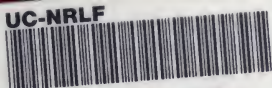


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CONVICT No. 25.

: OR THE CLEARANCES OF :

: WESTMEATH :

JAMES MURPHY.

GIFT OF
Knights of St. Patrick



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"Convict No. 25"

OR,

THE CLEARANCES OF WESTMEATH

A STORY OF THE WHITEFEET

BY

JAMES MURPHY

AUTHOR OF

"LAYS AND LEGENDS OF IRELAND"; "THE INSIDE PASSENGER";
"HUGH ROACH, THE RIBBONMAN"; "THE SHAN VAN VOCHT";
"THE FORGE OF CLOHOGUE;" "THE HOUSE IN THE RATH";
"THE FLIGHT FROM THE CLIFFS,"

ETC., ETC., ETC.

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1913

Pigeon

PREFACE TO FIRST EDITION.

WHEN Ned Dowdall, at the battle of Ross, was firing from his window on the advancing troops, before glancing along the shining barrels of the muskets which his wife kept ready loaded to his hand, he was wont piously to exclaim: "If what I'm going to do be a sin, may God forgive me for it!"

Ned had come from the land of the Macamores; had shot snipe with home-made bullets among the Shilmaliers; and, though now engaged in peaceful trade as a saddler, could not resist the temptation of trying whether or not his right hand had lost its cunning, and whether his gun was as true pointed at a prancing horseman as at a whirling bird on the wing.

He had some qualms, however, as to whether he was doing quite right, which he soothed down by this little act of anticipatory contrition. So, at any rate, the people used to say when—the hangings and shootings that succeeded the rebellion over—they grew merry and light-hearted again. Whether it was true or no, I cannot positively say. Ned is in his grave this many a year—and it is not I that would tell a lie on him!

But his pious exclamation occurs to me just at present—for a reason. When "Hugh Roach, the Ribbonman" first appeared, there were some who said that it were quite as well it had not been published, because of the subject with which it dealt. And the same objection may possibly be urged to "Convict No. 25," which treats of similar matters. Now, I should like to know where an Irish Novelist is to look for the lights and shadows necessary to a novel—where to look for the story of human hopes and sorrows and passions—if it be not in the strife waged for many years in Ireland between the dominant faction seeking the extermination of the people, and the latter equally sternly resolved to hold their homes? The one had all the authority of the Government; had the so-called law of the land at their back; had horse, foot and artillery at their hand for the purpose: the latter had no one to look to for aid but to themselves.

Hunted and trampled, with nowhere to go—for America seemed in these remote days a very land of exile and doom—there was only one way open to the people, and they despairingly

adopted it—the way of secret combination. The calendars of Tipperary—most terrible records in civilisation—tell the deeds that followed: the heartless clearances and the fierce reprisals; the evictions, the stealthy bullet, the dock and the hangman's rope. If there were levelled homesteads and ruined walls shaming the face of day, the glare of blazing mansions flared athwart the sky, startling the night; if desolation encompassed the crouching family in the shelterless *bawn*, it was not unfrequently followed by mourning in the Hall or the Castle; and if there were a period of fierce and frenzied exultation for the downfall of some evictor, it was terminated in addened sorrow soon after by the sight of the forms dangling from the prison battlements!

It was a veritable Dance of Death—such as Hogarth had never dreamt of painting!

Looking back at these times now, one wonders what other course was open to the people to follow. It brought many a one to the scaffold; but it is an undoubted truth that it saved to thousands the shelter of an Irish roof who otherwise might have been outcasts—or worse—on the streets of the cities of the New World.

At any rate, I hold that the scenes of that period are fair and legitimate field for the story-writer. But I can, if critics condemn me, plead conditional repentance after the fashion of Ned Dowdall.

J. M.

NOTE.—In issuing this, the FOURTH of the series of Irish National Novels, I cannot otherwise than express my thanks to my countrymen for the singular and extraordinary success which has attended those previously published. They have served to set aside, once and for ever, the statement that Irish Literature would not be supported in Ireland. My belief and experience are that, whenever anything in any way worthy of the Irish people is presented to them, they are ready to give it a most cordial, appreciative, and whole-hearted support.

PREFACE TO PRESENT EDITION.

It is now nearly thirty years since "CONVICT NO. 25" was first published. This "superb story"—as the *Freeman's Journal* called it on its first appearance—seems to retain its popularity in undiminished degree. From America, from Australia and other far-away lands orders come for it in shoals to Dublin. Perhaps this is because the incidents narrated therein appeal especially to the men—and their descendants—who were cruelly evicted, torn from their homes, and forced across the sea to foreign countries.

In Ireland things have changed in these thirty years very much for the better. Landlordism has been done away with—and it was high time! The people are themselves their own landlords now, and evictions are things of the past. But the stories of the sufferings of the people, so late even as forty years ago, will not readily die out of peoples' minds—least of all from those who suffered the bitter pangs of eviction and are now resident abroad. It is to commemorate some of these episodes the story has been written.

JAMES MURPHY.

Dublin, 1913.

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“CONVICT No. 25”;

OR,

THE CLEARANCES OF WESTMEATH

CHAPTER I.

RUPERT CLARENDON.

“You are a long time driving, I suppose?”

“Driving, is it? Faix you might say that.”

“And know the road well?”

“Sorra bit but I do—every inch ov id. Why wouldn’t I? when I have crossed it day an’ night, Sunday an’ week-day, for nigh forty years.”

“I wonder you were not afraid—driving at night?”

“Afraid is it—what would I be afeard ov?”

“The country is in such a disturbed state.”

“So it is; but I didn’t disturb it.”

“And such dreadful reports in circulation about the doings of the people?”

“Faix, sir, here’s how it is!” said the coachman, turning round to address his querist, who sat beside him on the box of the stage-coach, going from Dublin to Athlone; “here’s how it is! I don’t meddle or make wid anyone. I carry all, gentle and simple. I carry the poor man as well

as the rich man. An' the man that's going to be hanged as well as the judge that's going to hang him. Why would I be afeard, then?"

"But the country is very disturbed—isn't it?"

"Blood-and-tundher! to be sure it is disturbed; but for all that, you might travel from Grangemore to Collochstown wid your pockets full of gold, and sorra wan 'ud touch you. A blind man might carry all the diamonds in Dublin Castle through the lonesomest lanes in it, an' sorra wan he'd be the less from the time he'd lave the ould Castle of Grange till he'd warm his legs at Freeney's fireside at Collochstown. Not one. You're not long in Ireland, I think?"

"No, I only came into Dublin yesterday."

"An' you're goin' to Athlone?"

"Yes; I'm going to Athlone."

"Goin' to join the rigemint?"

"Yes; the 84th." The young fellow tapped a valise which was by his side, and on which the words "Rupert Clarendon, 84th Regiment—for Athlone," appeared in white square letters, in confirmation of what he said.

But the coachman had already seen the luggage disposed in the interior of the coach, and did not need confirmation of his statement.

"I carried a gentleman of your name down here many years ago, Colonel Rupert Clarendon—was he any relation of yours?"

"He was, poor fellow—he was my uncle!"

"I thought as much. As soon as I saw the name and looked at yourself, I said to myself, 'that young gentleman is mighty like poor Colonel Clarendon that was shot in the quarry—I'll engage he's a relation'."

"Well, so I am. You have a good memory to recollect it."

"Recollect it! It's as fresh in my head as if it happened yesterday."

"It's a long time ago now," said the youth, a little reflectively.

"It is, that," said the coachman. "It's nigh twenty-two years, if it is not more. I remember it as well as yesterday. I drove him down to Athlone, sitting on the very seat you are sitting on now. And a fine, pleasant, hearty gentleman he was. God forgive him his sins!"

"I have only a very slight remembrance of him, though I was called after him," said the young officer. "I think—at least we always so understood it—he met foul play on that occasion."

"Sorra foul play. It was all fair and square. There were plenty around him to see fair play done. 'Twas all the work of a mornin'."

"I forget the incidents. It was very little spoken of in our family. It occasioned awful sorrow. I was but a child, but I well remember the blinds being pulled down and the house darkened at our place in Devonshire. And I remember the body coming home to be buried, and the funeral at which all the tenantry marched. I remember well the shock it gave us all. It was about an election, I think."

"So it was," assented the coachman. "I remember the morning well. I was driving by when they were carryin' the body up from the quarry on a door to put it into the carriage that was standing on the roadside."

"Dead?"

"The bullet went right through his breast. Sir Hardinge——"

"Who?"

"Sir Hardinge Hargrave. 'Twas he that shot him! You'll see his place as we pass."

"How did it happen—I mean what brought it about?"

"Well, you see 'twas election times—an' the boys were a little disorderly—shouting and cheering for their own man an' against the other, nothing more."

"Yes," assented the officer, listening with keen intent to the narrative.

"Well, they got worse—I mean noisier—up to twelve o'clock; bekaise, don't you see, whin they saw the voters comin' up, guarded by the bailiffs an' the like, to the pollin' place, they wanted to drag 'em off the cars, an' let 'em vote free."

"Couldn't they do that without any interference?"

"God bless you! no; they couldn't. How could they?"

"Why not?"

"Why they were all Sir Hardinge's tenants, and for three or four weeks afore the election they had all to come into the Big House—that's his house—the name is Grangemore Castle, but the people call it, for shortness, the Big House. So there they wor kept until the pollin' day, drinkin' and feastin' an' so on, becoorse, Sir Hardinge expected them to vote the way he wanted."

"Yes, that was natural enough; their interests were identical with his—were they not?"

"Faix, an' that's what they weren't," said the coachman; "for his candidate was a bad man, an' hard on the people, takin' their land from 'em, an' turnin' 'em out—an' the people had a man ov their own to put in. So, to make a long story short, the voters were pulled off the cars; an'

very glad they were to be pulled off, bekaise if they voted at all they should vote with the landlord, an' agin their consciences, or be turned out ov their farms."

"That was a curious way of conducting an election, if the people could not vote as they liked. What was the use of their having votes so?"

"Sorra use. If Ould Nick—God betune us an' harm!—wor put up, they'd have to vote for him, when the landlords tould 'em."

"Surely they were at liberty to vote for the man they considered best to make the laws for them. They had to take an oath that they voted for the best man according to their belief—had they not?"

"Sorra may care if they took a thousand oaths, they might take the chance of bein' turned out on the high road, or votin' as the landlord wished."

"But it was the men they elected who had to make the laws for them?" said the young gentleman, a little puzzled over this feature of the Constitution.

"Faix, an' it wasn't—but who wor to make the laws agin 'em," said the coachman with a grin. "But, for 'em or agin 'em, they should vote for the landlord's man, even if they knew he'd make laws to send 'em all to Botany Bay. So, as I said, the poor voters were glad to have their friends to pull 'em off—an' pulled off they wor."

"Yes."

"Well, Sir Hardinge was greatly vexed; an' he wanted the soldiers to fire on the people, an he read the Riot Act wance or twice. But yer uncle, the colonel, wouldn't fire on the people. Between you an' me, I think he knew how the whole thing was; so hot words passed between 'em, and I think Sir Hardinge called the colonel a coward."

A flush of hot blood mounted into the youth's face and temples at this portion of the narrative, but he said nothing.

"They went out in the mornin' just a little after sunrise : an', as I tould you, when I came up in the mornin', bowlin' along pleasantly, the first thing I saw was the carriage standin' on the road, above the quarry, an' the people carryin' the dead body on a doore up the side of the hill."

"There was some suspicion of foul play—was there not ? At least I heard so—that his pistol had been wetted."

"I never heard that. Sir Hardinge was always very handy with the pistols—an' was always ready to go out. Sorra wan readier in the whole country round. That's wan good thing that can be said of him anyhow."

Rather struck with the nature of this strange encomium, the officer asked—

"What sort of man is this Sir Hardinge—I suppose he still lives ?"

"Is it as a landlord you mean ?"

"Every way. Generally."

"Faix, as a gentleman, there's ne'er a finer in the country ; keeps a grand house ; sees plenty ov company ; an' houlds his head high among the quality. He keeps the finest hunters in the country, and spends his money freely. A good shot and a good horseman, an' what more would you want ? But as a landlord——"

"Well, as a landlord ?" said the officer, seeing the other hesitate a little.

"As a landlord," said the coachman, dropping his voice a little, for which there did not seem much necessity, none being on the stage coach but the two—"he's the devil entirely."

"How is that?"

"Why he's got a notion—an' bein' a proud, high-handed man, he makes it a point to carry out whatever he takes in his head—that he'd make more ov his land be makin' it into large grazing farms, besides makin' the country nicer to look at. He does not like—nor does his lady, who is from Scotland, where everything, I suppose, is fine and grand—to see the thatched houses, an' the little pratie gardens, an' the little childher, here an' there an' everywhere on the estate; so he's turnin' 'em out as fast as he can."

"Do they pay him rent?"

"Sorra may care whether they do or not; out they must go when he takes the notion. An' out they are goin' as fast as he can turn 'em out. Some of 'em he can't well turn out, bekaise they have laises; but he's thryin' to break the laises. An' there's no doubt at all but break 'em he will, bekaise he has plenty of money and can bring 'em from coort to coort."

"Well, after all, he has a right to do what he likes with his estate, has he not? It's his own, you know. The people can go elsewhere, can they not?"

"Where would they go?"

"I don't know—anywhere!"

"To beg?"

"No, not to beg—certainly not."

"To the poorhouse, then?"

"No, not there either."

"Where, then?"

"To get farms elsewhere," said the young officer, rather pushed into the corner by these queries.

"God help you! There's no farm to be had; there's no

work to be had. There's nothing before them but to beg—an' they'll be put in gaol as vagrants if they do that—or go to the workhouse."

"Well, it is hard on them," said the youth.

"You might say that. You'd know it better if you were to be livin' among them."

"And that, I suppose, is what leads to the disturbances?"

"That's what leads to the disturbances; an' that's what leads to the regiments that are in Athlone, more than enough to conquer the whole counthry; an' that's what leads to your bein' on the coach to-day," said the driver.

"Very odd," said the youth, "that the man who shot my uncle should be the means of bringing me to the same place. It is rather a curious coincidence."

The reflection occupied his mind for some time, and the conversation lapsed.

The day was a beautiful one in June, and the freshness of the morning had scarcely given way to the heat of the noon, as the four horses of the coach bowled merrily along the high road that led from the metropolis to Athlone. It was in the days before the smoke of the engine had appeared among the pleasant fields of Westmeath, and before the railway carriage had supplanted the stage-coach. The warm sun of the summer day made the country, always rich and lovely, look at its best; and, as its light bathed the fields and the groves and and the white houses of the farmers in a flood of glory, the traveller, though little accustomed to taking notice of scenery, could not help being struck with the pleasantness of the landscape.

Occasionally a little stream, winding its tiny way among the bordering meadows of the Shannon, crossed their road;

and, as the light fell on its clear waters, it turned it, as it shone in the distance, into a ribbon of sparkling silver.

“That’s a very pretty girl,” said the youth, as they drove up to one of these tiny rivulets—awakening the attention of the coachman, who, letting the horses go along at their own pace, was busy filling his pipe.

The object to which he devoted his attention was a young girl, standing in her bare feet, on one of the flat stepping-stones which crossed the brook. A tubfull of clothes beside her on the bank, and a beetle in her hand, declared her occupation. Her head was bare ; and the brown locks, tied negligently at the back, rose in waving masses over her forehead. Her face, which was strikingly handsome, was rendered even more so by the flush of healthy exercise which suffused it, giving to her an air of exceeding animation and attractiveness. The sleeves of her dress were turned up above the elbows, displaying a pair of white arms which would have served to a sculptor as a model for those of Venus ; and as she raised them to her throat to draw tighter the dress over her breast—which, to give her more freedom at her work, she had left partly bare—he should have been blind to whatever is beautiful in this world who failed to notice and admire their exquisite roundness. She had been too busy at her work to mind the approach of the coach ; or, perhaps, the splash of the wooden beetle on the wet clothes prevented her from hearing it, but it had almost come up to her before her attention was attracted. Her first impulse, taken unawares, was to fasten over her throat the dress which she had left open ; and it was when the first blush of startled surprise had covered her face with an additional and attractive glow, in which innocence was

blended with beauty and health, that the youth's eyes fell on her.

Whether it was that her white arms, uplifted to her throat, made her face beam with such a contrasting glow of health and blushing innocence, or that the rosiness of her countenance made her arms look of such exquisite whiteness, it would be difficult to say; but unconsciously the traveller found himself admiring both with intense surprise.

If a nymph had arisen from one of the deep pools whereon the eddies gathered and sparkled, it could not have astonished him more. Indeed, as she poised herself on her two bare feet, which almost rivalled her arms in their snowy whiteness, it appeared to him as if she really did in some way belong to the stream. And if she had suddenly disappeared beneath its sparkling surface, it would have seemed the most natural thing in the world.

But the young girl did not disappear beneath the water that murmured musically against the stepping-stones whereon she stood. A look, indeed, came into her eyes betokening an intention of running away, but probably the fact that the meadow sward around her gave but little shelter for hiding, or that the surprise was too sudden to give her time to do anything but stand still—or both together, fastened her to her post; but there she stood, the first surprise over, and bravely held her ground.

She might be about eighteen or perhaps twenty years of age, one would think, judging from the rounded bust she displayed; but her face was youthful-looking even for that.

"That's the prettiest girl I ever saw," said the traveller in an undertone to the driver.

The latter, looking up, glanced in the direction indicated

by the speaker, and let his eyes fall on the girl. As he did so, he promptly pulled up the horses, which had been going along of their own accord at a leisurely trot.

"What, Maury! is this you? I did not expect to see you here," said the coachman, with great animation, as he descended from his seat and leant over the battlement of the little bridge—which at its highest was not more than four or five feet over the surface of the stream, and not much more than double that distance from the water-nymph.

"I am too far to shake hands with you, Joe," said the girl laughingly, as, having pinned her dress, she dropped the beetle beside her, and proceeded to tie up the masses of waving hair which fell in attractive disorder over her neck. "I never heard you coming up."

"Ah, that's always the way with people in love, Maury, they sometimes can't hear or see," said the driver pleasantly.

"Can't they?"

"No; they can't."

"You've experience, I suppose, Joe," said the young girl laughingly, as, having arranged her hair temporarily to her satisfaction, she took up the wooden beetle again in her hand.

"I can see it by you—if I haven't aself," said Joe.

"No; you cannot."

"Why not?"

"Because I'm not in love——"

"I'd like to hear what Kevin would say to that."

"What Kevin?"

"Oh! yes. 'What Kevin?' Take care I don't tell him when he comes back."

"Tell what?"

"Everything."

"Sorra bit but you may tell him—anything you like. So drive off with your horses now. You're a nice mail driver, you are, stopping on the road at every hand's turn to torment people."

"I wouldn't stop for anyone but yourself," said the driver, with a mock air of gallantry.

"Wouldn't you, though?"

"No, I wouldn't."

"Well, don't stop for me aither. I have my work to do."

"An' nice work it is."

"Is it?" said the girl, as she threw her eyes, lighted up in a gleam of pleasure by this badinage between herself and the driver, on the white linen sheets at her feet. "Is it?"

"It is," said the driver, "there's no work I'd rayther be at nor beetlin' clothes."

"Maybe 'twould be better for you to be drivin' your horses. You might find it handier."

"Sorra bit; I was always good at the beetlin' when I was a little fellow——"

"Why, you're that still!"

"I mane, when I was a young fellow——"

"That must be a long time ago!"

"Why, what age d'ye think I am, Maury? Fair play, now, you know!"

"About seventy-two!"

"I'll be twenty-five, plaze God," said the driver, emphatically, "the last day of this month. Twenty-five, that's what my age 'll be."

The burst of laughter from the lips of the girl, that followed this pronouncement, rang musically over the rippling stream

"An' I'll show you, if you like, how well I can handle the beetle. 'Twould be worth your while to buy me off from Bian, and make me your assistant."

"Musha ! 'twould be aisy buyin' you, Joe. Sorra much they'd charge for you now. They'd give you away for a thankee, I'm thinkin'."

"Not so little as that, Maury ; though a good many 'ud give a grate dale away for the thankee from you. Ay, and have given it."

"What have they given ?" said the girl, with a look of innocence and surprise veiling the laugh that was ready to burst out.

"Their hearts."

"Their hearts !" she said, with a look of grave astonishment, which had indescribable drollery and fun in it. "What's that ?"

"Did you never hear talk of a person's heart ?"

"Oh ! yes. I know now. It's the new thing they have for the guns in place of the flint."

"That's the very thing, Maury, dear," said the driver, laughing, in spite of his attempt to keep up his gravity. "Them's the very things, my dear. You wor always such a clever little girl, I knew you would soon know. But I'm in a hurry, and must be off. Will I show you how I can use the beetle ?"

"Here you are, then ! let us see you handle it for a spell," said the girl, as, tripping across the stepping-stones, her white feet and ankles making the sunny stream look dark by contrast, she stepped lightly on to the grassy meadow bank, whilst the driver, crossing the wall, came down beside her.

The traveller—who had been listening with amusement to this little bit of repartee, and watching with intense admiration every passing change of laughter, fun, mock surprise, and pretended astonishment that came over the handsome face and smiling lips and sparkling eyes of the young girl during the conversation—now noticed that the driver made no attempt to display his skill on the beetle, that the pleasant and airy badinage had ceased, and had given way to a whispered conversation, which, judging by the altered face of the young girl, appeared to be a very serious one indeed.

Somehow, the grave seriousness of her present aspect seemed almost as attractive as when her face was in its most laughing mood ; and the look of sobered thought that was in her eye, and the appearance of quiet and gentle resolution that betrayed itself in her closed lips, as she conversed in low tones with the driver, added a fresh charm to her appearance in the eyes of the officer.

It was with some surprise, however, that he noticed, towards the conclusion of the conversation, that her lips quivered and trembled, as the lips of those in trouble or sorrow tremble and quiver ; and that, when they shook hands and parted, the girl's eyes were filled with tears.

"That's an odd change in the course of a few minutes," thought he to himself. "Who could imagine that that laughing face of a few minutes ago would be in tears and sorrow so soon. And for no reason that I can see. She can't be in love with the coach-driver, surely. Though she might ! Girls, I've always heard, are so strange in their likings. She's a pretty girl, anyhow. A very pretty girl. The prettiest, I think, I ever saw, by Jove. I wish I knew her !"

But either the coach-driver did not want him to know her, or it never entered into his head to introduce him, at anyrate he did not, but climbed up again to his seat, and, taking the ribbons in his hands, prepared to resume his broken journey. The driver waved his whip in parting salute, the officer politely lifted his hat, the young girl dispensed between them a nod and a smile—which latter, one of them at least thought, put to shame even the brightness of the June sun beaming on them—and the horses were once more in motion ; in rapid motion, this time, to make up for the delay.

The traveller turned around, as they passed a sharp angle of the road, to look back where the water nymph stood. She had climbed up on the battlements of the little bridge, and with the beetle in one hand, and the other drawn over her eyes to shield them from the rays of the sun, was intently watching the departing car. The officer could not forbear again lifting his hat in salute ; the young girl waved her hand in rapid response ; the coach turned the corner with a rush, and the incident was over.



CHAPTER II.

THE RUNAWAY.

NOT quite over, however, for the vision of the barefooted maid lingered long in the traveller's mind, filling it for the present to the exclusion of every other subject.

"Well, that's the handsomest girl I ever saw," said he to the coach-driver, as the high bank of daisied grass that bounded the corner shut her off from his sight.

"She is a nice girl," said the latter; "but she's better than that, for she's a good girl."

"She appeared to feel sorry for your parting."

"How is that?"

"I saw tears in her eyes."

"Ah! did you? Good reason there was for 'em," said the driver gravely.

"Good reason?" said the traveller with some astonishment, as he noticed the gravity with which the other spoke; "she's very young and—and very pretty—to have good reason for tears."

"They're never too young for sorrow in this country," said the mail-driver bitterly. "I think they're born for it, an' nothin' else. Hang me, if I don't!"

"What trouble could she have, except a falling-out with one of her sweethearts? for I am sure she has plenty of them," said the traveller gaily.

"What trouble!" said the driver, "what trouble! Is there one single man, woman, or child that's able to think,

that's not in trouble in this very county that we're drivin' through?"

"Trouble about——?" asked the officer hesitatingly.

"Trouble about," said the driver, breaking in on his hesitation, "how to live; where to lay their heads; how to keep together—God help 'em! How that the father and mother may not be separated from the children, and the children may not be pinin' and dyin' wid their father and mother away from 'em."

"I don't clearly understand you," said the officer, who felt a little puzzled at the driver's way of putting the matter.

"It's easy enough to understand me. I'll be bound there's not wan for miles around here but understands it well enough!"

"Do you mean being turned out by the landlord?"

"Av coorse—what else?"

"What we were talking of just before that pretty girl turned up?"

"Just so," said the driver; "that and nothing else."

"You don't mean to say that any one would dream of turning that girl out of her home?"

"Don't I, though; why?"

"Her beauty—her extraordinary beauty alone," said the traveller.

"Sorra farthing they care for youth or beauty, unless they could throw an evil eye over it themselves—and that they can't do. Time was when they could, but they can't now. They can do things nearly as bad, however."

"I can hardly think," said the officer, "that any one, merely on the score of improving or beautifying his property, would strip the home that shelters such a girl as

that. Why, her very presence is enough to make a desert beautiful."

"That's your way av looking at it," said the driver; "and at your time of life it's natural enough; but don't you think it's just as hard upon every creature to be turned out, though their faces be not as fair as her's? Aren't they all able to feel sorra and thrubble, and hunger—one as keen as the other?"

"I suppose so; but it would seem a case of exceptional hardship with her."

"Not a bit, except that she's handsomer than many others. That's the only difference. D'ye see these old walls there beyant?"

The driver motioned with his whip in the direction of a place some fields away on the rising ground. Two meadow fields—whereon the rich, ripe hay lay ready for the mower, and shimmering in the flood of light and heat which fell upon it, steeping it in a sleep of rich repose that was broken only by the hum of bees that now and then rose in clusters—lay between.

The walls lay bare and dirty and unsightly in the midst of the luxurious vegetation around—a miserable excrescence on the rich face of nature. It seemed as if, in the glory and peace of the summer sun, and the smiling landscape surrounding, they were a degradation and a profanation.

Even they themselves, in themselves, showed a miserable and repulsive contrast. The whiteness of the outside of the wall, that raised itself a few feet over the luxuriant hedge coloured with wild roses, was in appalling contrast with the black, dirty, and hideous appearance of the

chimney-stack that still stood, grimy and miserable, above them. And the wall-plate, whereon the broken rafters had rested, showed another black line in striking contrast with the exterior. Nor did the holes—where once the windows reflected brightly the streaming sun-rays, but which were now dirty and frameless, with black streaks, where the rain had descended from them, showing on the walls—add to the appearance of the place.

The traveller lifted his eyes in the direction indicated ; but the repulsive sight that met them made him at once take them away.

“They look bad—don’t they?” asked the driver.

“They do—hateful, abominable.”

“No great addition to the scenery?”

“It’s disgusting to look at them, even,” said the young traveller, with a look of repugnance, very expressive of his disgust, on his face. “Why don’t they remove them? They’re a blot on the landscape.”

“They weren’t always a blot on the landscape,” said the driver.

“It’s hard to think how they could ever have been an ornament,” said the traveller.

“It’s not at all hard,” replied the driver. “It takes but a short time to make anything in this world look ugly. The handsomest face—ay, the very face of that girl you so much admired—if two days in the coffin, would lose a great deal of its beauty. It’s so with a ruined home. Bad as that looks now, I’ve seen the time, not very long ago, when its white walls an’ windows, an’ fine thatched roof, wor the finest things you could see. I was always glad to come in sight of it, as I came on my way, in the early morning,

from Athlone to Dublin, it looked so pleasant and bright. Now look at it ! ”

“ It does look unprepossessing,” assented the other.

“ It’s pretty well ruined— isn’t it ? ”

“ It is.”

“ Well, it’s nothing to the ruin ov the family that lived in it.”

“ What happened them ? ”

“ They wor turned out.”

“ For what ? ”

“ For nothing.”

“ Surely not for nothing ; there must be some reason.”

“ Except to add their farm to wan the Scotch steward houlds, the divil a wan ! ”

“ Would they not do with it as well as the Scotch steward ? ”

“ To be sure they would, an’ twice as well. But Sir Hardinge or his lady—I don’t know which—but it does not matter, for it’s all wan—thinks there’s nothin’ for this place but the Scotch. Scotch gardener, Scotch steward, Scotch shepherd, Scotch lady’s maid, Scotch bailiff, Scotch everything and everybody. An’ Scotch farmers, as long as he can get the land to give them. So he took it into his head to turn the Moores out, an’ give their farm to the Scotch steward to add to his own.”

“ What became of them ? ”

“ You saw Maury O’Keeffe beetling the clothes yonder, didn’t you ? ”

“ Yes ; to be sure I did.”

“ She is a nice-looking colleen, God bless her !—Isn’t she ? ”

“ Nice-looking ! ” said the youth enthusiastically. “ I

never saw handsomer ! I was thinking, while you were speaking to her, what an extraordinary sensation she'd make if she appeared at a ball-room in London."

"Well, I don't know about that ; but it was allowed on all sides that Norah Moore was a far handsomer girl. You never saw the sun dancin' in the early mornin' on the stream and dazzlin' your eyes with its brightness, half so bright as her eyes. And the whitest monadoun that grows in the turf of Mullawn-a-beg wasn't half as white as her neck and her forehead. If you had all the sorrow on you that ever a man had goin' to the gallows, one smile from her, when she'd look straight at you, would make you forget it all."

"She must have been a striking girl."

"She was. Fairer never was reared in this country. Handsome wouldn't describe her. Pretty would give you no idea of her. You'd have to go back to the ould language of the country—to the Irish language—to get words to describe her. They have 'em there. Words to tell that kind of beauty that you think can't belong to any one on earth—that steals your heart right out ov you, and keeps you dreamin' night after night—ay, an' day after day—about her—that makes you feel cravin' to see her again, until you fear its lonesomeness and—madness. That sort."

"By Jove ! I should like to see her," said the young traveller with enthusiasm ; for the manner more than the matter of the driver's words had given him a strong conception of her beauty.

"It would be better for you not. There was not a young fellow around the country that wouldn't have soon gone astray in his mind about her. One or two did lose their

senses, and was sent to the 'sylum for some time, but they recovered since."

"You surely don't ask me to believe that?"

"I am telling you not a word but the truth," said the driver impatiently. "Nor would I tell you so much but that we happen to be talkin' about these things."

"I beg your pardon," said the youth. "I was more expressing my surprise than throwing doubt on your words."

"Well, you may believe me what I say," said the driver, a little mollified by this prompt submission and apology.

"What became of her?"

"They had no laise, an' they wor turned out."

"To give their land to the steward?"

"To give their land to the steward. I'm not sure that there mightn't be some sort of a quarrel between Kevin Moore and Sir Hardinge's son—for Kevin was a high-spirited young fellow, and didn't like to see the other comin' around the place oftener than was necessary—lest there might be talk about him and Norah—for he thought a grate dale, an' no wonder, about his handsome sister, and wouldn't let her name be mixed up with young Hargrave's, even if he lived in a house a hundred times as big. I'm not sure that there was, but I heard there was. Kevin was a silent, proud young fellow, and not likely to talk about such a thing."

"They were turned out at any rate?" asked the traveller with considerable interest. In truth, if it were known, the interest arose more from the vision of beauty that the driver's description had conjured up in his mind than for any particular care he had to learn the fate of a family of whom he had never before heard of, and probably never would again. "What became of them?"

"What became of them? Well, the mother—poor old woman!—was taken to live by some friends in Roscommon, for she darn't stay on this estate, nor in the county, for no one dare take her in. Norah—poor girl!—went to her uncle, an Abbe, in France. And Kevin was thransported!"

"Transported!" cried the youth. "What was he transported for?"

"If you ask me what he did, I answer nothin'—nothin' as far as I ever heard."

"Well, it's a strange country——"

"You may say that," broke in the driver.

"But strange as it is, there's no power anywhere that the English flag waves to deprive a man of his liberty without sound reason," said the officer.

"Wait till you're a little while in the country an' you'll see."

"Well, I hope I'll not see *that*, at any rate."

"Faix an' you're likely—if you stop any length."

"To see a man transported for nothing?"

"Divil a less."

"Surely they must have tried him?"

"Faix they tried him, sure enough."

"Well?"

"Well, they tried him, an' that's all."

"But they must have had some charge against him?"

"To be sure they had a charge agin him. What was aisier?"

"I don't clearly understand you."

"It's aisy enough understood for all that. Did you ever hear talk of the Ribbonmen?"

"Yes; I have read about them."

"Well, the Scotch steward, who got Kevin's lands, swore he was a Ribbonman—the captain of the Ribbonmen."

"Yes?"

"That was enough."

"Why enough. They must have proved the charge."

"Sure they did prove it. Didn't the steward swear to it?"

"But a man's oath is not proof. If I go and swear against a man I have accused of a crime, that wouldn't be taken as proof—not in England at any rate."

"Well, it'll do here—when you swear the right way. Who tries you? The men that want to get rid av you. Morebetoken if they've done you any harm, and think you might become dangerous. Who swears agin you? Those that are put up to it by them that's goin' to thry you. Do you think they'll be disbelieved, an' all their oaths go for nothin'? Very likely indeed!"

"It's a queer system."

"So it is. So Kevin Moore, poor fellow, found id at any rate. For they found him guilty of bein' a Ribbonman—aye, the captain of Ribbonmen—though every one else in the country knew that he never had the laste taste to do wid 'em; and he was thransported for seven long years."

"How long ago since that happened?"

"Not much more nor six months."

"And Kevin?"

"He's on the say long ago for Van Diamen's Land. And whin he comes back—if he ever comes back!—though he's not much more nor your own age—he'll come back an ould grey-haired man; and there won't be one of his kith or kin in the country left to give him a shake-hands."

"That's a very sad story," said the officer, with a good deal of distress in his voice.

"So it is; but," said the mail driver, laying down his reins and fumbling in his coat pockets for his pipe, "as we've been tellin' nothin' but sad stories since we began to talk, what d'ye say to havin' a smoke, and changin' the conversation?"

"Agreed," said the traveller, cheerily; "it does not do one good to hear these stories constantly. Will you have one of these?" pulling his cigar-case from his valise.

"No, thank you; I prefer the pipe. There's nothin'," said the driver, with good-humoured sententiousness, "for a long drive like a shough of Tullamore tobacco."

"Very well; have your choice," said the traveller affably. "But you cannot object to this," pulling a flask from his valise; "it's Irish make too—Power's—and of the best."

"You're right there," said the driver, as he took the flask from the hands of the other and took a long pull at it; "give me a fine day, a smoke of Tullamore tobacco, and a tumbler of Power's whiskey, an' I wouldn't exchange my seat on this box for the King on his throne."

"You might have less to trouble you, at any rate," said the officer as he lit his cigar, fixed himself more comfortably on the seat, and prepared to enjoy the remainder of his drive. "Where shall we stop next?"

"At Cullochstown."

"How far are we from it?"

"About four miles."

"What sort of a place is it?"

"Well, it's not much to boast ov. But you can get a good dinner there—fat chickens, nice bacon, and salmon

bleeding fresh from the river. What more does any one want?"

"No more," said the traveller contentedly. "I wish we were there. Hallo! What's that? Hold the reins, man!—hold the reins!—the horses are off!"

They were off, indeed; the reins, which had been resting on the driver's knees while he refreshed himself, slipped off, in the hurried leap forward of the horses, on to their backs beyond the power of recovery.

A hurried glance around of the traveller disclosed the object of his question, and the reason of the sudden starting of the horses.

Over the line of furze bushes that bordered the sides of the road arose the smoke of a gunshot. So much he could see on the instant, but nothing further; for the necessity of at once attending to the runaway horses, that were now beginning to gallop at great speed, precluded any further attention to the cause.

But the suddenness of the start, and the fact of the reins having dropped on the horses' backs from the driver's hand, presented not the slightest chance of staying them in their course. Each successive plunge of the foremost horses drew the reins further towards their heads and away from the driver, until in a few seconds hope of again clutching them was lost.

As usual in such cases, with each successive moment of uncontrolled action the horses grew more excited, until from a gallop they quickly burst into a race of headlong and maddened speed.

The road was a good one, being the mail-coach road from Dublin, and the main one of the county; and as they tore

along, they kept fairly in the centre. They were ascending the hill and the officer hoped before they reached the top they might moderate their speed and grow tired. Once or twice he looked to see if it were possible to leap off, but a glance told him that at the speed the horses were tearing along, and the height he was from the ground, the attempt would be certain death.

"This is awful," said he to the driver; but the beat of the horses' feet possibly prevented the latter from hearing him, for he made no reply, but looked as if in a trance on the flying steeds before him.

Contrary to his expectations, the horses did not tire as they topped the hill. Whirling the coach after them as if it were no heavier than a load of feathers, they rushed with unabated speed to the summit.

As they swung over the arch of the road, the traveller's eyes for a moment seemed to lose their power of seeing in the sudden flood of terror that crossed his brain!

Straight before them was a heavily declining road, corresponding to the hill they had surmounted; and down this the excited and frightened steeds now plunged.

That they could gain the bottom unharmed he knew, even in the excitement of the moment, was as impossible as anything well could be in this world. That the labouring coach could keep upright was also equally unlikely.

"What?—what are you saying?"

He shouted the question in the driver's ears, for he saw the latter was speaking; but he could not hear him—"Did you speak?"

The driver, looking with excited eyes before him, only mentioned one word—

"The quarry!"

"The quarry! What of it?"

"There!"

The driver pointed with one hand, as with the other he clung to his seat, in the direction indicated. But the traveller could see nothing.

With the straining horses flying down the hill, with the heavy coach leaping and bumping after them, swaying from side to side in imminent danger every moment of being flung on the road, there was no time for observation—there was no time to do anything else than hold on to their seats with all the energy they could muster.

Death was staring them in the face, and no human power could avail to prevent it. They were rushing with lightning speed to it!

Vague visions of people rushing across the fields to the roadside; shadows of women standing at cottage doors, calling to them with uplifted hands; a fleet rush past a carriage hurriedly drawn into the ditch, wherein the white faces of ladies were upturned to them with every sign of horror thereon; and—a sight met his gaze which made the blood rush back to his heart!

The road took a sudden turn to the right, and straight before him lay the rocky precipice which the driver had mentioned as the quarry—separated from him only by the low wall of the road.

That the horses would face the gate which opened in the wall fronting them he knew by some sort of instinct, and that death followed their plunge across it needed none to say!

They did face for it. Covered with sweat and foam, and

blinded with their rush down the hill, the foremost horses flew at it !

He could see them as they leaped the wall and disappeared at the other side ; he could see the others plunge after them ; he could feel where the body of the carriage, parting from the wheels, followed across. A confused sense of falling — of falling down, down — with the noise of smashing wood and breaking glass in his ears — followed ; a strange sense of having come to the end of his downward journey ; and a feeling as if his mother's hand were passing over his forehead, as in the days of his childhood, ensued ; and then vacuity—death !



CHAPTER III.

GRANGEMORE CASTLE.

NOT death, however. Not death—but sleep. A heavy, dreamless, unrefreshing, sleep—as he could feel when he awoke. A sleep so steeped in Lethe, that he could remember nothing that preceded it. Only that he had been sleeping, and that sleep had left him dreadfully tired and weary and sore.

“Where was he—where had he been ?”

In a dreamy, wearied way, these questions floated obscurely through his brain. But there was a dead weight of weariness still to be—as it inertly seemed to him—slept off ; and he closed his brain again to all sensations of thought.

But he could not sleep. He lay senseless and comatose ; but it was not sleep. The dormant nerves and muscles of

his brain had not yet begun to actively work, and the will, or the soul, lay crushed and helpless beneath their paralysing load.

Suddenly, in a confused way, the voices of people talking fell on his ears.

"Do you think he is better?"

"Oh, yes! he is better, much better."

"Will he recover, do you think?"

"Oh, yes! he will recover consciousness during the evening or the night, or to-morrow morning at furthest."

"He's a long time in that condition now."

"He would have remained longer so, but for the trepanning."

"It will not interfere with him in the future, I trust."

"Oh, not at all. It is an operation frequently performed. He has had a marvellous escape. I drove by the place this morning, and you would certainly say if a man had had a thousand lives he would have lost them all. It must have been an awful leap."

"So it was—frightful. Sir Hardinge, Maud, and myself were driving up the hill when we saw them rushing down. We had barely time to turn aside when they flew past us, and, almost before we had time to turn our heads around, they were over the quarry wall. It was an awful sight!"

"It must have been."

"How is the driver?"

"The driver fared very well. He got off with a broken arm and a little stunning. It happened luckily enough that he alighted on one of the horses that had been killed in the fall. Were there any of the officers here to-day?"

"Yes; the colonel and three or four others drove over

early this morning. They are out in the demesne with Sir Hardinge and Marmaduke."

"Are they returning?"

"Yes; they are waiting to hear your report on the poor fellow, and they will probably stay for luncheon."

"Well, I have some more calls to make, and I shall look in again in the afternoon late. It is possible he may have recovered consciousness by that time. At least I hope so."

"About what hour do you think you could call?"

"It would be impossible to say. I have some patients to visit, and a good deal depends upon the condition they may be in, or how much of my time they may take up. But, probably about six."

The conversation ceased; but whether because the speakers left the room, or had stopped the talk, the sick youth did not know or even think of. Their words fell on his ear, and entered his reviving brain, more because he had no power to keep them out than from any interest he was able to feel in hearing them.

He dropped asleep finally; and again, after a second or two—as it seemed to him—the conversation was resumed.

"You think he is better?"

The question was asked, however, this time not in a lady's voice.

"Certainly, colonel, much better. I can see by the working of his eyes under his closed eyelids that his brain is again resuming its functions. He will awake conscious."

"I am very glad to hear that," said the first speaker.

"It has been a sad accident for the poor fellow,"

"There is one comfort, however," said the same voice

that spoke before ; "it will occasion him no permanent injury."

"That is even better," said the colonel. "His family are old friends of mine, and he comes to me with the highest recommendations. I should be sorry, indeed, that any serious or permanent injury had happened him."

"If you wait for half-an-hour, you will probably find him awake."

"I shall wait for twenty half hours for the matter of that," said the colonel, as he drew back the curtains and glanced in at the sleeping patient.

The motion of the curtain broke the comatose feeling that kept the faculties of the latter bound as if in chains of lethargy, and he opened his eyes.

"Doctor ! he's awake !" said the colonel softly.

The doctor came quickly to the bedside and took the patient's hand.

"Just as I thought," said he ; "he's all right. His pulse is quite steady and equable. You may speak to him."

"Do you know me, Rupert ?"

Too weak to speak, the young fellow smiled languidly, but recognizingly. His lips partly moved, and the colonel bent down to hear, but failed to catch what he said.

"He'll scarcely be able to speak to-night ; but," said the doctor, "if you ride over in the morning you can talk with him as long as you wish. It would not be judicious to speak much to him to-night. But you can see by his eyes how much better he is."

"I see," said the colonel. "He is much better."

"He will improve rapidly, the depression being raised off his brain," said the doctor.

"How very like his father he is," said the colonel, unheeding the doctor's last remark, as he gazed down on the pale face before him; "and how like his uncle."

"That puts me in mind to ask," continued he, as a sudden thought struck him, "what time will he be fit to be removed to barracks?"

"That I could not say—so much depends upon his physical strength, and the shock his system may have received," said the doctor.

"Because," said the former, sinking his voice to a whisper, "there are reasons——"

"Yes, I know," assented the doctor.

"Why he cannot—why it is not at any rate advisable that he should—be left here longer than is absolutely necessary. You know them?"

"I do."

"That saves me the trouble of explaining," said the colonel.

"It is a curious coincidence that, of all places, he should be brought here," said the doctor.

"I should rather call it a most singular misfortune," said the colonel. "I dread what the family would think in London if they knew of it."

"But there is no necessity why they should."

"Nay; there is every necessity why they should not. It would open the old wound again. And how painful those wounds were, and how full of agony and sorrow, no one knows better than I do."

"Well, if his arm knits quickly, as from his youth and strength it is more than likely it will, I should not be surprised if he would be capable of being removed in a week."

"Very well. Let the suggestion come from you ; you understand ?"

"Yes, perfectly."

"This is rather a delicate matter to move in, and we must avoid even the suspicion of offence."

"You may trust me to manage that."

"Very well. My time is up. Good-bye, Rupert ! I wonder does he hear me ? You will see him again to-night, doctor. Give him every attention. I shall ride out early in the morning."

"Coincidence ?" thought the colonel, as he walked slowly from the room. "Coincidence ? Well perhaps it is. But it is a very unfortunate coincidence—very—a most unhappy and painful coincidence."

The colonel, however, did not ride to barracks at once. The party of officers that had ridden over with him were out on the balcony in front of the mansion, talking with the ladies of the house, or smoking a cigar with Sir Hardinge and his son, and enjoying the view therefrom ; and there the colonel quickly joined them.

Grangemore Castle was built on the side of a gently sloping hill, that faced partly to the south and partly to the west, so that from its balconies a magnificent view could be had across the plains of Westmeath and far into the King's County and Roscommon. The broad stream of the Shannon winding in the distance like a ribbon of gold when the rays of the setting sun fell on it, could be readily discerned ; and the fair valleys, where once the O'Moores of Offally held sway, slept afar in the southern horizon, with the evening light mellowing the blue outlines of their hills.

A couple of miles distant, on the rising ground—curiously

enough in the centre of a bog—rose the ruined towers of a keep, wherein once the former possessors of the fertile lands around had held sway, and wherever the banners of the O'Moores had floated. What curious idea had induced these forgotten lords of the clan, whose name was now nearly extinguished, to build such a splendid edifice—splendid in the days of its prosperity, and massive and imposing even in its ruin—in such a place it would be hard to say—possibly in these pre-artillery days, the fact that the swamps and marshes around made very effective protection against assailants, whilst the deodorising influence of the peat contributed so much to health.

At any rate, whatever was the motive, there was the building; and very strange and picturesque it seemed, as through its broken and ruined arches, clearly visible even in this distance, the setting sun of the June evening shot golden rays, like so many arrows, lighting up its ivied sides and broken masonry and the worn tombs beneath, with a new glory and lustre. It made the ivy glisten and tremble with yellow light, blending with the plant's pure green. It turned the rotting roots, with more than fairy touch, into rough lumps of virgin gold. It coated the bare and naked masonry, thick and grouted, with a coating such as deftest hand of human builder had never learned to give. And it wrote on the tombstones, worn smooth by the trampling of countless generations, and above the forgotten dust beneath, the word "Resurgam," in such letters of light as only the hand of God can write, and bright enough to make the most unbelieving infidel read.

But picturesque as was this ruin, on the rising ground in the centre of a bog—all the more picturesque, perhaps,

because of its unwonted position, and of the ricks and clamps of turf around, and of the black sides of the banks and the shining loughs among them (now, too, catching up some of the effulgence of the sunset and looking like settings of diminutive gold leaf dispersed here and there, save where the black and gnarled ends of some huge bog tree raised their centuries-hidden edges)—I doubt if Sir Hardinge once cast his eyes on it. Although he might—if the truth be that coming events cast their shadow before, or if the faintest shred of prophecy attached to him—have gazed on it with surpassing interest.

But he did not ; and the conversation passed on to various matters relating to the society the speakers moved in.

Sir Hardinge himself stood, as the driver had told Rupert Clarendon, in the best society in the county, and held his head high among "the quality." Of ample means, liberal disposition, and lavish munificence, he could afford to, and did, give parties so princely in their character that none others could hope to rival them. His word was law in the Petty Sessions Court, or the Quarter Sessions, and even the Judge of Assize lent a ready ear to his suggestion as to the innocence of this one or the guilt of that other ; and assumed the black cap with a grave countenance, or reduced the sentence to three months without hard labour, very much as the great magnate dictated or suggested.

CHAPTER IV.

THE COLONEL'S STORY.

IN person Sir Henry Hardinge was a fine, handsome man, about fifty years of age, with a heavy moustache, which was turning iron-grey ; and with a pair of rather large eyes, in which a sense of his own importance, that habit of command which a man who knows his word is law and that his orders must be obeyed gradually assumes, and an aspect of cold, haughty selfishness, which under certain circumstances would develop into stern cruelty—were all blended. On the whole, a man who, under control, might be an excellent citizen, but commanding as he did unbounded and uncontrollable sway in the county, was likely to prove a formidable foe to the people, if occasion arose.

His wife answered very much as a woman to her husband as a man. Of fine, handsome presence, too, and about his age, she too had that look of haughty self-appreciation, which raised her very much above those qualities of gentleness and kindness and merciful consideration for others which are generally supposed to be the most excellent attributes of womankind—of ladykind, perhaps, especially.

Her ladyship, however, was not without excellent reasons for her haughty appearance of self-assertion and self-appreciation. She was daughter of the Marquis of Exterminie, an obscure nobleman and living in some midland county of Scotland—whose main possession was the title. That the most noble the Marquis was extremely poor, and that

her brother the Earl was a notorious scamp, who had been once publicly accused of cheating at cards at a gambling saloon in Baden-Baden, did not tend in the slightest degree to diminish her self-regard.

That she brought her husband the baronet no fortune, and that she had none to bring, if he desired it, in no way made her think better of the impoverished tenantry on the estate. Pretty much as the conquering Normans, under Duke William, treated the subject Saxons, did the haughty Scotchwoman treat her Irish tenants. There was no harsh word, meet to pass a lady's lips, which she did not use to describe them. On the day when they came to pay their rents—these awful days of the 25th of March and the 22nd of September—or again on the 1st of May and 1st December—days more terrible to Irish tenants than the eve of a bombardment to a beleaguered city—she was careful, with her son and daughter, to absent herself from the castle, and to go to the metropolis. Before she came back, the kitchen, where the principal tenants were accustomed to dine, and the office in which they paid their rents, had to be purified and fumigated to get rid of all trace of those obnoxious people—very much as the captain of a slave dhow, after landing his slaves (and getting paid for them) might repaint and fumigate his vessel afresh. And, to carry the illustration a little further, her ladyship whilst so disliking those abominable rentmakers, was, after the manner of her kin and country, known to be extremely fond of the rent they brought, and to look very sharply after it.

Her ladyship found fault, and justly—and so did Sir Hardinge—with the wasteful and improvident modes of husbandry of most of the tenants. Though, as mankind in

general learn nothing by looking at the stars and the skies and the trees and the mountains, and acquire knowledge simply by the process of being taught, it might have occurred to Sir Hardinge, as indeed it might similarly to his brethren throughout Ireland, that a good deal of the fault lay on his own shoulders, and that he had not taken means, in exchange for their heavy rents, of exhibiting to them or teaching them these newer methods of farming. But as no one else of his kind throughout the country ever entertained this idea as a duty devolving upon him, Sir Hardinge cannot be too much blamed for it.

So also her ladyship disliked the thatched roofs she saw along the roads in her drives, and the rickety half-doors, across which knitting women leant and sung and crooned in the evenings, and the black rick of turf that was clamped up against the barn—destroying the landscape ; or against the gable end of the house, making it look still dirtier. Possibly the people, if confidentially questioned on the subject, might reply that as they had no security, and that their rents would be increased if they made any improvements, it were safer to leave things as they were.

But as every one knows, that would be a most ridiculous reason to put forward. Ask my Lord Mortagor or Sir George Haymarket if they would for a moment entertain such an argument. Why it would be against political economy, freedom of contract, rights of property, and all the rest of it. No ; certainly not.

But there was one other matter to which her ladyship had the most unbounded objection—nay, abhorrence.

The number of children, the extraordinary, unpardonable number of children these people had ! That was what

offended against her ladyship more than anything else. In every house she drove past they were playing—if the cottage were by the roadside, they were playing on the road; and in the fields, at the back of every village, their laughter and shouts could be heard the long summer's day—and into the night too!

Was ever such a condition of things? It offended against the laws of social economy, of political economy—and of every other "'conomy" that lazy thinkers had tormented their heads trying to invent!

How could people be thrifty, provident, comfortable, happy—or, most important of all—wealthy, under such circumstances? Would not one or two children suffice in each family, without these swarming groups.

Her ladyship was disgusted; and, if there were no other reason for the proposed clearances, surely this were sufficient!

Having dealt so long with this aristocratic couple, mainly because they have so much bearing on the subsequent events of this narration, and are therefore necessary to be described; and because, also, as I am told they furnish a very correct type and likeness of many other noblemen and baronets and their ladies—then and now scattered all over Ireland—I must sketch with a more rapid hand the son.

Marmaduke Hargrave was born—if we must commence so early—and was brought up, and was sent to Eton to be educated. I am afraid his studies were not very closely attended to, and that Marmaduke was not very clever, for his proficiency was of the slowest.

His proficiency in what is known as booklearning, that is—for his proficiency in other branches, not usually set down in the school-curriculum, was of the fastest—so much

so, that when the young gentleman came home to Grangemore at the age of twenty-two, he came home with a broken constitution, a shattered frame, a very large record of unpaid debts in his note-book, and a vast deal of unliquidated bills and post-obits in the hands of Jews, and sundry habits not to be recorded, and perhaps, as the auctioneers say, too numerous to mention.

This was, however, but the commencement of his education—the preliminaries, so to speak. The next thing was to get young Marmaduke a commission in the Guards, which was done at the expense of several thousand pounds. Herein the young gentleman continued for five years. Herein, too, he finished his education.

Whatever he had not completely mastered at Eton and Oxford he learned with finished perfection in the Guards. The most perfect hand at racquet and rouge-et-noir; the most skilful hand that ever extracted money from a Jew (at 60 and 80 per cent.); the most exquisitely dressed young gentleman that ever fingered a cigar down the Haymarket or in the Argyle Rooms or St. John's Wood; and the most generous patroniser of the drama, whose presents to the female members thereof—whether in the shape of diamond rings or gold bracelets studded with pearls—no one dared to rival.

There is no real happiness to be had in this world, the moralists are never done telling us. So Marmaduke found it; for at the expiration of five years he left the Guards, with his health irretrievably ruined, and with more spent money and floating bills behind him than the smartest clerk in the National Bank could enter and tot up from ten to three of a hard-working day. His expenses had tested Sir Hardinge's

resources very strongly, and the bills which had come by degrees tumbling in during the six months that had elapsed since his coming home were of a still more formidable character. To do Marmaduke justice, he had completely forgotten the existence of these acceptances—but it was very different with the holders thereof. A man may forget where he was born, forget his father and mother, forget his own name—but in no instance, I believe, has it ever been known that the holder of a bill forgot the date on which it became due or to have it duly presented.

It was among this trio—for the young lady must be allowed to speak for herself—that Colonel Montford took his seat, as we have described.

The conversation ranged over a great many subjects, and at last lapsed as the Colonel proceeded to light his cigar.

The cigar was a little stiff at first, and the Colonel, to make it freer, opened his penknife, and proceeded to slit the end.

This incident—and the penknife—seemed to turn the train of his thoughts in a new direction, for he immediately said :

"By the way ! that young fellow that was transported !"

"Yes—which of them ?"

Sir Hardinge asked the question, because the Colonel seemed lost in thought for a second.

"I have been trying to remember his name."

"Corrigan ?"

"No ; not Corrigan."

"Walsh ?"

"No ; not Walsh either."

"Hanley—Kinsella—Moran ?"

"Moran ! Yes ; I think it was Moran. He had a very

handsome sister, if you remember. She made an astonishing impression at the trial."

The Colonel, taking his eyes from his cigar, raised them to Sir Hardinge in a vain effort to correct his defective memory as he said this.

On the way they happened to alight on her ladyship's face—indeed, they could not well do otherwise, for the party sat in a sort of a circle whereof her ladyship formed the centre and opposite figure—and, as they did so he was more than surprised to find her ladyship turn up her aristocratic face and nose with an air of supreme contempt and repugnance.

"A *very* handsome girl," he repeated with some insistence, nettled at the silent exhibition on the part of her ladyship, and looking at Sir Hardinge; "so very graceful and quiet and self-possessed, that she appeared vastly superior to her station in life. Yes; I think Moran was the name."

"Scarcely Moran from your description," said Sir Hardinge reflectively. "Moran had no one belonging to him but his father and mother, and I think, if my memory serves me, they both died by the roadside in a hut the son built for them. Yes; I think it was for something like that he was transported. But I really forget; one can't keep these things in his head. No; it was not Moran. It was, possibly, Moore."

"Yes, yes; quite so. Now I remember the name. Moore! Yes." The Colonel paused.

"Your reminiscences are failing in interest, my dear Colonel," said Lady Hargrave pleasantly.

"I beg your ladyship's pardon a thousand times," said the Colonel smilingly; "but my mind went rambling a little over the matter. It was the knife put it into my head, and

other things followed. But Moore, my dear Sir Hardinge?" Sir Hardinge blowing a puff of cigar smoke from his mouth, nodded.

"You remember the house wherein, we were told, the Ribbonmen were holding their meeting."

Sir Hardinge bowed his remembrance.

"And which we surrounded; but where we were not, unluckily, able to find them—they having just gone, as it was afterwards sworn."

Sir Hardinge bowed again. The cigar was too enjoyable and the subject of too trifling and frivolous a character to be worth interrupting his smoke by making even a remark about it.

"And where we did not find them—though we surrounded the place at midnight, precisely at the time they should be there. Well, as I was coming out that night, I found this penknife under my feet at the door. I put it into my pocket, and, as I did not wear the same uniform since, it remained forgotten there."

There was so little worth noticing, or even hearing in this incident, that Sir Hardinge glanced at his lady with a smile in which quiet contempt was strongly marked, and even the younger officers of the group felt that feeling known to the country people as "*sharousse*," coming over them, as the Colonel's pointless anecdote ended.

"You are not in a vein, my dear Colonel Montfort, for story-telling this evening, I fear," said her ladyship, making a motion to rise.

"Nay, Lady Hargrave," said the Colonel, "I had not quite finished. What made me think it remarkable was: that, written with some sharp instrument, such as another penknife,

on the haft were the letters 'K. M'M.,' very curiously and peculiarly made too. It might have been of some account at the trial."

"The only account it could have been of, I should think," said Sir Hardinge carelessly, "would have been to prove more conclusively his guilt for the initials were his—Kevin Moore. But as he was found guilty without it, its absence did not make much matter. He has nearly touched Botany Bay by this time. 'The Ocean Conqueror' is a good sailer."

"What name did you say?" asked the Colonel with renewed interest.

"'The Ocean Conqueror'; she sailed from Plymouth some four months ago with a cargo of convicts on board for Van Diemen's Land. Moore was amongst them. They must be nearly there now."

"'The Ocean Conqueror,'" said Colonel Montfort thoughtfully. "You cannot possibly mean the vessel that was wrecked in the Bay of Biscay some two months since."

"Wrecked!" said Sir Hardinge with some surprise.

"Wrecked!" said Lady Hargrave in very great surprise.

"Wrecked. Yes, certainly," said the Colonel. "A very old friend of mine commanded her, and escaped with his life by a mere chance. Rather not by chance, but by the signal bravery and herosim of one of the convicts. Yes, that was what he stated in his letter."

"And what became of the convicts?" inquired her ladyship anxiously.

"My lady, I believe the greater portion of them were drowned."

This distressing information, however, did not appal her ladyship nearly so much as the Colonel had a right to—

and did—expect from her anxiety in putting the question. "You see, my lady—so my friend wrote to me at least—a storm came on, such as comes, even in the stormiest seas, but once in a man's lifetime ; and the drowning vessel was driven ashore on the rocks. Before being driven ashore on the rocks, all the convicts were liberated—they could not be allowed to drown, you know, cooped up—and got a chance to save their lives. Some did save their lives ; some faced for shore and were drowned swimming ; some, again—and a great many indeed they were—broke open the ship's lockers, even when she was drifting on to the rocks rushing into the arms of death, and staving in the casks of spirits that were on board, drank themselves drunk and mad. It was an awful time ; at least it was an awful description the captain gave me."

"And what became of those who escaped ?"

"Why, my dear Lady Hargrave, it would be difficult to say. They were not likely to report themselves to headquarters I should think."

"Could they not be secured on landing ?" she asked with ill-concealed interest.

"Hardly, my lady. Foreign Governments would scarcely allow us to seize them, after being once landed on their soil, except by the regular routine of the Extradition Act. And that only in the case of those who had been found guilty of offences under it."

"And I suppose there is no account of any of them ?"

"No ; I should think not. They were very unlikely to give an account of themselves—if they escaped. And of course it would be quite impossible to say who did. Hundreds of bodies were washed ashore from the wreck for

several days after. I should have taken more interest in the matter if I had known Moore was on board."

"Because of his sister?" asked her ladyship with a movement of shoulders, which might indicate ennui, or contempt, or dislike.

"Because of his sister. I felt very sorry for her. And that so singularly good-looking a girl should have been cast adrift on the world by the imprudence of her brother."

"Imprudence is hardly the word—don't you think, Colonel."

"Well, perhaps, I should have said crimes, though, it is, I dare say, imprudence in the beginning that leads up to crime in the end," said he. "And now, as the evening is growing late, I think we had better be bidding good-bye. We shall have the pleasure of seeing you again in the morning. We shall ride over and see how your young patient is doing."

"Do you think he is much better?" asked the young lady, for the first time entering into the conversation.

"Well, yes; I think he is," said the Colonel. "The operation of trepanning, which could not be dispensed with, has been skilfully performed, and I have no doubt he will be able to converse with us in the morning."

The Colonel and his brother officers mounted their horses, and after a cordial leave-taking rode down the avenue, out to the high road, and on their way to Athlone.

Sir Hardinge and his son and daughter retired within the drawing-room; but her ladyship went round to the stables to see her favourite hunter.

Inside the door she met her steward.

"Do you know the news I have for you, Keilif?" her ladyship asked in a half whisper.

"No, my lady," said the steward.

"The vessel that was carrying Moore and the other convicts out to transportation, was wrecked at sea."

"And he was drowned, my lady, was he?"

"Of that I am not sure. Some escaped. These people always have some luck of that kind on their side."

"I hope not, my lady," said the other, with a look of alarm in his face. "If he escaped, where would he escape to?"

"France or Spain. In either of which cases he would be a free man."

"If he gets free, my lady, he won't be long free. You'll find he'll face for home as soon as ever he can. If your ladyship and Sir Hardinge will have the country carefully watched, you will soon tell if he has escaped."

"You think he would come to——"

"I'm sure he would. Even before a week was over his head."

"He might go to his sister."

"No; he'd come to see *her* first."

"You think so."

"Sure of it."

It was very noticeable that the steward, after the first few words of conversation, ceased addressing her ladyship with his usual deference.

"I am very much struck with this matter, unaccountably so."

"I don't see any need for alarm," said the steward; "if he comes back he can be arrested again. And if he's drowned so much the better."

"I am troubled over it. It was most unfortunate this

wrecking," said her ladyship as she turned to go back, without looking once at her favourite hunter. "It leaves me in such a state of uncertainty."

"It was very lucky, I think, for he was most likely drowned," said the steward, as, without lifting his hat or taking the trouble to make her any other salute, he turned on his heel and entered the stables.

CHAPTER V.

IN THE CONVICT YARD.

It is a cold, foggy, raw morning in the month of March. A grey mist, clammy with rain and exudations from the marshes and fens around, hangs over the dreary courtyard. The black stone walls of the prison, made more bare and miserable-looking by the white mortar that fills up the interstices between the stones, can scarcely be seen at their furthest distance. The little heavily barred windows, so black and forbidding—they seem like blind eyes in a pockmarked face—are entirely hidden and blent with the fog, where the prison overlooks the boundary wall. But nearer, where from the black bars, painted and glistening with the pitch-like appearance of the silicate, adown which the rain of the drooping mist sootily drips, they stand out in all their forbidding barrenness and massiveness.

The courtyard is paved with square "sets" of stones which, from much walking on by prisoners' feet, have in some cases been worn to the smoothness of flags. It is not very large, but looks even much smaller than it really is by

reason of the great height of the walls. Surrounding the walls are little sheds, high enough for a man to sit but not to stand in, with stone seats in them. Here, at odd times in the day, and on odd days, the prisoners sit and pick oakum. Not regularly and as a rule, but on such days as the necessary works of cleaning and scouring have to be performed in the interior, and when they therefore cannot remain in their cells. In the courtyard itself they sometimes, at regular hours in the day, and everyday, exercise. The exercise consists in marching around and round in a circle, under the keen and scrutinizing eyes of half a dozen warders. No word is spoken as they march in this monotonous manner; no word is allowed to be spoken, for the vigilant warders are quick to detect any attempt of that kind, or even a motion or nod of the head, as the opposing ranks pass each other.

It is a dreary place for us, standing within the gate—which latter, made of strong sheet-iron, is loop-holed to allow of warders, in case of a tumult or an emeute, firing upon the outbreakers—to look upon for the first time. But how dismal its sight must be to those eyes that have looked on nothing else for the past two or three or four months—if we except the whitewashed walls of their bare cells!

How bright must the fair world outside look to their weary hearts! How beautiful the vast expanse of blue skies—of which they can see but a little part—spreading to the horizon, with their piled up masses of white and golden clouds! How green the grass! how exquisite the flowers! how bright the streams and rivers, gleaming with the sun-rays! What sense of sorrow and sickening deprivation, to know that hours, and days, and weeks, and months, if not years, must

roll their slow monotonous course around, before the "time is up," and they walk forth free !

Its power is telling, indeed, if we may judge by its effect upon that young fellow who emerges from the doorway, and stands in the mist in the courtyard. His face is youthful, possibly made to look more so by the closely cropped hair. His form is well-built, lithe, and muscular ; but in the nerveless manner in which his eyes seek the ground, and his head bends down, there is ample evidence how fast the spirit and life are wearing out of him ! how fast the chilling effects of the monotony of the prison is engraving itself into his nature.

He has not long, however, to stand in his lonely abjectness and depression, for a warder in blue uniform, with a cap around which is a red band, steps out into the court-way, note-book in hand.

"Number ?" he laconically but sharply asks of the convict.

"No. 25," the latter answers with a start. He has evidently been thinking of something far removed from the prison walls ; and the quick query of the warder has broken in upon some deep train of painful thought.

"Which division ?"

"No. 2."

"How long here ?"

"Four months, I think."

"Sure ?"

"No ; it may be more, may be less. I have lost note of time,"

"Age ?"

"Twenty-three."

"Where from?"

"Ireland."

"Time of sentence?"

"Seven years."

The convict gave utterance to this last answer with a gulp that showed at once the pain and the dread it occasioned him.

The warder checked the answers, after he had noted them down, with a large book which lay on a small white wooden table outside the door—evidently placed there recently, it looked so incongruous with the black surroundings of the courtyard.

"Right in all but the time," he said. "You're here but two months."

"Two months!" said the youth. "It seemed four, or even six. It has been a long two months," he said, with an expression of something like weariness and something like fear.

Perhaps it was fear; fear of the seven long years to follow, seven years, which would be seven years of eternity if measured by the length of the past two months.

"Take that bag."

The convict had seen no bag; but, looking in the direction indicated by a nod of the warder's head, he saw that on the little wooden table, besides the open book, there was piled up a great heap of little black bags. Obeying the injunction, he took up one of them.

"Take four rations and put them into it."

He had seen no rations, and looked inquiringly at the warder. Again looking in the direction of the nod, he was surprised to see—surprised in that he had not noticed it

before—a large basket at the further side of the table, filled up with pieces of black bread. It was brown originally, but each loaf having been cut into four pieces, and having been a long time cut, had grown hard, and mouldy, and almost black.

Doing as he was desired, he took up four of the black squares and placed them in it.

“Now hang it over your right shoulder and under your left.”

While he was in the act of following this order, two men came through the door bearing a something that looked very like a carpenter’s bass, but much larger and apparently very heavy.

He was not long left in doubt as to what this was ; for, following the two men, came another with a workman’s cloth cap on his head, and leathern apron before him.

He appeared to be a blacksmith ; and almost instantaneously the convict’s mind went back to a forge by the roadside in a pleasant county in Ireland. How rapidly it had outlined itself on his mind !

How plainly he saw the low door, the strong vice outside it, the thatched roof, the circular flat stone with water in the centre, which boiled and hissed and seethed when the red-hot irons were thrown therein to cool ! How often had he, when a little boy going to school, peeped in timidly, seen the great bellows, the glowing fire, and watched with delight the myriad sparks fly about, as the brawny arms of the smith beat with his big hammer the red-hot iron on the anvil ! And what a perpetual surprise it was to him that these flying red-hot sparks never fell on the smith’s bare arms and burned them !

He was disturbed from these reflections by a peremptory order from the warder.

"Hold out your arm ! Don't have me to tell you again."

He had been already told to do so, but in his rapt imaginings had failed to hear the first order. As non-attention to, and non-obeyance of, an order on the moment was a serious prison offence, he now held out his arm promptly.

"Not the right arm—the left !"

He withdrew his right arm which he had put forward, and presented the left. The smith quickly clasped a hinged ring from which depended an iron chain, on his wrist, locked it, and placing a similar one around his ankle, outside his trousers, fastened the depending chain to it ; and with a blow of the hammer turned in the link and secured the connection.

Having thus securely fastened his arm and leg, the smith stood up and, without speaking, entered the prison again.

Very much surprised at these proceedings. which were so rapidly done and over that he was unable to form an opinion as to the reason thereof during the process, the prisoner ventured to ask the warder. He knew very well that that also was contrary to the regulations ; but his surprise and astonishment overcame all else.

"What have I done ?"

The warder looked up from his note-book wherein he was making some remark—probably certifying opposite his name that the work had been properly performed—with a look of inquiry on his face.

"These !" the convict said in explanation, pointing to the fastenings.

"Oh ! oh !" said the warder, now understanding ; "convict ship."

As he said the words another convict, whom he knew well, appeared at the door.

"Stand at the end of the shotyard, No. 25 !" said the warder. "You're finished."

Convict No. 25, being finished, however, did not move, and, not moving, the warder raised his eyes in astonishment.

"I beg your pardon," said No. 25, in response to his look, "I don't mean to be insubordinate ; but I think—I'm sure—there's some mistake here."

"Mistake ?"

"I mean," said the convict submissively, "in sending me to the convict ship. I'm sure I'll soon be released. I'm sure as soon as they'd see—and they were sure to see it before long—that I was innocent, I'd be released."

He spoke very fast, not to give the warder time to interrupt or stop him. But the warder did not interrupt him. He only smiled a curious smile. He had probably heard the same entreaty hundreds of times from hundreds of convicts, and knew what it was worth.

Convict No. 25, taking his smile for friendliness, hastened to seize the advantage.

"Look in the book, and see if there is not some mistake in it. Do, please ! I'm sure they don't intend to send me away until they see if I am really guilty. Maybe it's some mistake in the number, and that it isn't 25 that's down. Do, and you'll oblige me. Do, please."

There was sufficient of agony and torture in his trembling tones that might have evoked sympathy from the most callous to human torture.

But the warder was accustomed to this. He had seen it, in one shape or another, every month, every week, every day of his life.

Possibly he could not do his work if he allowed humanity to interfere with him. At any rate he did not.

"Take your place in the shotyard, No. 25."

One more despairing effort from the convict.

"Will you look in the book, and see if there is not some mistake? Do! I am sure there is. It's somebody else's number that is down for me. Look! It's so far to come back when they find me innocent, and I am released. Maybe they'd never look for me or think of me if I'm sent away."

Thus, in trembling agony.

"If you don't obey orders and take your place at once, I'll report you for bread and water and irons during the voyage," said the warder, rising.

There was no ignoring this command; and Convict No. 25 slowly and downcastly moved off, and somewhat cramped with his fetters, took his place as directed.

He leant against the wall at the further end of the shotyard in hopeless despair.

He was going to go, then, away! During all his time in the prison a hope—a slight one, no doubt—had never left him, that, by some fortunate chance, his innocence would be discovered and his release ordered. Every morning when the warder entered his cell, or when at noon he came to measure the quantity of oakum he had picked, he looked up at his face, hoping against hope that he might hear the message of deliverance.

But that little shred of comfort—the weak reed of sus-

taining hope—was now swept from him. The horrors of the convict ship—in nothing so horrible as in that it bore him away for ever from the dear ones in Ireland—were before him. What chance was there, in that horrible land to which he was going, at the uttermost extremity of the earth, that he should ever revisit his own land again? Or, if he did, how should he find those he had left behind? Dead, or gone out of the place—perhaps leaving no trace behind them!

Seven years! What a gap in a man's life! How long to look forward to under the happiest and pleasantest circumstances! But oh! what an eternity it seemed, to spend seven coming years of the brightest years of manhood—when all that is happy and bright twines itself around a young man's heart—in a foreign convict settlement, associated with the dregs of mankind, without the smile of mother or sister or sweetheart to shed a blessing and a halo around him. Seven years!

How strongly every familiar scene in that dear land, between which and himself the broad ocean should soon roll, stood out in his memory! How little of that bleak prison-yard and clinging fog that met his eyes he saw with his mind!

Green valleys, wherethrough the streamlets rolled; gentle hills, whereon the meadow-flowers grew and waved; woods, where the broken sunlight fell in golden patches; hedges, wherein the trailing woodbine sheltered and shaded, and almost strangled in its embrace the wild moss rose; and faces——

Oh! there indeed the sorrow lay. There was what made the heartstrings rend and crack. There was what filled the bursting heart with fire, and that parched the throat dry.

Oh ! faces loved and cherished ! Dearer than aught else in the world, dearer than life itself, how you filled with your airy grace and heavenly sweetness the bleak surrounding of that barren prison-yard—blotting its hateful sight away, that foggy, dreary, March morning !

He was awoke from his happy reflections—and brought back to his agony again—suddenly.

And he was surprised to find that a long row of convicts, similarly "finished" as himself, stood in a line with him. How could the time have slipped by during which all these men had been so equipped, without his noticing it ? Alas ! so pleasant were these dreams and remembrances, that nightfall could have come on him without his awakening from them.

But there was one thing calculated to rudely awaken him from these day-dreams.

And that was the coupling of him to his neighbour, the right hand of one to the left hand of the other. Which process effectually banished them !

Then, down the stony yard of the prison square, filing through the fog, like weird phantoms crossing that gloomy and darkened border-land that old mythologists told us led into Hades. And with perhaps but as little left of hope or comfort.

Out through the opened gates, and along the miry roads ; their chains clanking dully beside them ! Tramp, tramp, tramp through mud and water ; for their peculiar mode of travelling prevented their being able to step over any rut, or trench, or obstacle on the way.

It is hard to beat down hope in the breast of the young for any length of time. Blessed be the hand of God ; that

has instilled its revivifying spirit in the breast of mankind that sheds a brightness over the darkest hours of human sorrow!

So Convict No. 25 found it, any rate. The sight of the open country, shrouded in mist and fog though it was, raised his spirits; and the unceasing march forward, chained though he was, sent the blood rushing in healthy flow through his veins.

Conversation was forbidden; and the four warders, two before and two behind, that walked with shotted guns, guarding them on their way, had strict orders to prevent it.

But in the splash, splash of the men's feet through mud and pools, and the accompanying clank, clank of their fetters, it was difficult to detect a whispered conversation. The men could talk and whisper, not turning to speak to one another, but walking with their eyes looking straight before them, over the shoulders of their preceding neighbours.

Convict No. 25, therefore, walking forward and finding his spirits rise with the unwonted exercise, felt a strong disposition to talk to his companion. He had for the first hour of their dreary march not even looked at him, so occupied was he with home reminiscences, and his gloomy downheartedness. But, now that the exercise had driven these feelings away, he felt disposed to open a conversation with his neighbour. It was so long since he had conversed with any one, the silent system being in vogue in his late residence, that the desire grew on him with crushing force.

Glancing around sharply and quickly at his companion, therefore, he noticed that he was an old, careworn man of middle height, with a face of such ghastly whiteness that it seemed to No. 25 to be the most extraordinary colour he

had ever before seen in human countenance. It was made all the whiter by reason of a thick stubble of black beard that covered it.

Set in the countenance was a pair of eyes, which much relieved the pallor of his countenance by their extreme liveliness and restlessness. They had much the same watchful and frightened expression constantly dominating them, that one might expect to find in a trapped fox.

"I say," said No. 25.

"Better not," said the other, shaking with a twist of the connecting handcuffs, the speaker's hand.

"Why not?"

"We'll be heard."

"We can't in this noise of walking,"

"They'd hear you thinkin', so they would. Leastways they always heard me."

"You're an Irishman, I think."

"So I am."

"So am I," said 25 encouragingly.

"I see that," said his companion, looking onwards, at the back of the man trudging before him—for he was not high enough to look across his shoulder. "I see that. I'd be surprised if you worn't."

Rather wondering at this curious statement, Convict No. 25 asked, "Why?"

"Because they're never done transportin' 'em. They ought to have enough to fill Van Diemen's Land by this."

"What are you in for?"

"For havin' too much money."

"I don't mean that. How long?"

"For life."

"For life!" exclaimed Convict No. 25 with astonishment.

"No talking in the ranks there!" shouted a warder who had, unheard by them, walked forward from the rear to within a few yards.

"What is your number? Oh, yes, 25," said he, as he approached and looked at the number on his cap. "Convict No. 25, I'll report you to the captain for disorderly conduct."

A slight shake of the handcuff by the little man, as the warder passed on to the preceding ranks, intimated as plainly as possible "I told you so; you don't know them as well as I do."



CHAPTER VI.

THE HAUNTED CONVICT.

ON, on, through the mud, and slop. and fog! Hedges, iron gates, tall trees, came upon their view—came to them, and receded into the distance. Carts, and carriages, the drivers whereof held their horses' heads and stayed to look at the convicts, also went by. Women, with their children in their arms, stood at cottage doors to look at the fettered ranks as they passed, or, if some distance from the road, walked thither to take a better and mayhap a sympathetic look at them; and perhaps to shudder a little as they looked forward to the future of the little ones in their arms.

It would be hard indeed to think that any one of these fettered and handcuffed men, spattered over with mud, the result of their method of marching, clad in these hideous

grey garments, with the numbers of their convict rank, in substitution for their names, stamped on the fronts of their caps, the collars of their jackets, and their sleeves, in red letters, could ever have been innocent children fondled in mothers' arms.

If they passed through a village, the warders with their shotted guns at half-cock still marching before and behind—as if the prisoners were wild dogs that might at any moment burst forth and do mischief—the villagers all rushed into the street to see the chained outcasts mutely march past.

After three or four hours of this ceaseless and monotonous march, No. 25 began to feel a sense of thirst grow upon him, which increased with each successive mile, until he thought he could bear it no longer. His throat and mouth grew dry as a limekiln, and his tongue could scarcely afford the moisture to wet his parched palate and throat. Mile after mile passed as he suffered in this manner, until he felt that he could go no further.

He was about to say so to his companion when the clank of the butt-end of a gun rang on his ears, and a loud cry came along the ranks.

"Halt !"

As one man all stopped, for all were tired, parched, and worn. The exuberance and heartiness of the first few hours had worn itself out in the toil of the later ones, and the rest came with a grateful sense to all.

They had arrived at a small stream, and here they were allowed to rest, and eat, with the assistance of the running stream, their chunks of dry black bread.

Their handcuffs were quickly unlocked ; four stakes were planted in the ground at the four points of a parallelogram,

beyond the lines of which they were not to stir under pain of being shot : and by the side of the little river the convicts wearily flung themselves to drink of its waters to assuage the burning thirst, and to eat—those who were so disposed—their black bread and to rest their tired limbs.

No. 25 and his companion were not slow to avail themselves of the privilege ; and, the former throwing himself on his breast on the meadow bank, and bending his face over the water, drank long and copiously—as indeed did also his companion.

When he had satisfied his thirst, he endeavoured to munch his bread, but though hungry and stomach-weak, he could not eat it, so he restored it again to his bag.

“When you’re as long as I am at it, you’ll eat it ready enough,” said his companion, noticing this.

“How long are you in?” asked Convict No. 25.

“Ten years.”

“And you are in for life?”

“Yes ; I’m in for life.”

“What for?”

“Nothing.”

“Nothing !”

“Just so—nothing.”

“I thought that I,” said No. 25, glancing at his companion, “was the only one in for nothing.”

“Maybe I shouldn’t say for nothing—but it’s all the same. I’m in for having too much money, if you like that better.”

“I don’t like it better or worse,” said Convict No. 25 pityingly ; for, looking at the frightened and restless eye of the other, he at once inferred that his long imprisonment had touched his brain. And, as he instantaneously thought

of his own years to come, a sympathetic shudder passed through his frame. "But it's a pity to see any one in for life, no matter what it's for."

"Well, that's what it's for," said the man, munching his bread.

"How did that come?" said No. 25, with some curiosity, to see how a life-long sentence could arise from such a curious cause.

"It's a long story to tell; you wouldn't care to listen to it."

"Yes, I would. I have not heard a soul talk these two months."

"Nor I for three times that. But I don't know whether *he* would like me to tell it. Maybe not. I don't know."

He lifted his frightened eyes in sudden terror upwards, as if he expected to see some person standing over him. The bread he was munching fell from his hands.

Convict No. 25, startled a great deal by this striking exhibition of sudden and secret dread, lifted the bread and restored it to his hands. As he did so he was startled at the dreadful pallor of the man's face, and the look of awful terror that came out from his cowed and restless eyes. At first he was alarmed lest the man might go into a fit; but he did not, and gradually steadied himself.

"I can always feel when he's coming, or when he's near me," said he with a sense of relief, manifest in his utterance: "but he's gone now. *He* that showed it to me first."

"What?"

"The money."

"Where?"

"Down in the South."

"How does he come to see you?"

"I don't know; but he does."

"Where?"

"Everywhere."

"Everywhere?"

"Yes; everywhere, Sometimes in the cell."

"In the cell?"

"Yes; in the cell the darkest night he'll come. I know when he's near, for I always waken out of my sleep, in fright to find him standing over me."

"How does he come in?"

"I don't know. Sometimes when I'm picking oakum with the others he stands beside me, and lays his hand on my shoulder and talks to me."

"Talks to you?"

"Yes; talks to me. I must talk to him while he is there. Warder comes up; finds me idle and talking; twenty-four hours in dark cell on bread and water. And that happens once every week, or every two weeks."

"Why does the warder allow it?"

"Allow what?"

"Allow him to come."

"God bless you! the warder cannot help him. No one can help him. He comes when he likes, and he goes when he likes."

The convict raised his cap with his unfettered hand, and wiped with it the heavy drops of perspiration that stood on his brow. Fixing it again, he restored it to its former place.

"I don't understand it," said No. 25, much puzzled.

"No—nor any one. I don't myself."

"But he can't come in without their permission?"

"He can come at any time—through iron doors, and barred windows."

"Oh, then he's not a prisoner," said No. 25, with a new light breaking on him.

"I don't know what he is, but he comes."

"Oh!"

"Yes ; comes constantly ever since he first came to me."

"And how long is that ago?"

"Just ten years. I'd have forgotten how long, but I happened to see the name of the year in the governor's room, the day I was ordered off; only for that I wouldn't know whether it was five, or ten, or twenty. How *would* you? One day is the same as another, an' after a time you lose count ov the days, and very soon ov the seasons, and then ov the years. They all pass blank, blank, blank ; no stay, no guide, no mark to any of them. All alike!"

"Ten years is a long time," said No. 25 with a shudder.

"So it is. But they pass ; the years pass. I thought the first week would never pass, then the first month, then the first year. But, you see, ten have passed—passed whether I liked it or not. And will pass and pass until they carry me out ov the cell to throw me in the quicklime behind the prison. That's their burying-ground. I did not care how soon it came aither. I have not many years more to spend now."

"What age are you?"

"Thirty-five."

"Thirty-five!" said the other in astonishment. He looked more like sixty-five.

"Thirty-five," repeated the other decidedly. "I was sentenced when I was barely twenty-five years. I am ten years in. Anyone can make it out from that."

"How did it happen?"

"That I was sentenced?"

"Yes ; and such a heavy sentence."

"Simple enough. You see I lived in the County Clare. I was married there, and had a farm. The farm was not a very large one ; but it suited me very well. You could see the Atlantic from the house. When Mary sat sewing of a summer's day, before the baby was born, she could see the sea shining like a gleam of silver before her. And afterwards when the little thing began to take notice, she would lift it up to show it the vessels passing up and down. So I, if I was workin' in the fields, could see it if I lifted my eyes. It was very happy, so it was ; very happy. I think I can see it now through the fog. I often jumped out of bed in my sleep in the prison when I'd think I'd see the white sheet spread on the hedge afore the door. When I was workin' too far from the house to hear her voice calling, she used to spread a sheet on the hedge to show me that dinner was ready. Hundreds of times I've seen it in my sleep, in the darkness of midnight in the cell.

"It was too happy to last, maybe, or we didn't deserve it, or something. Anyhow we got notice to quit."

"Ah," said No. 25, with a choking feel.

"You know what that is," said the other turning quickly round to him.

"I do," said the former.

"It isn't that brings you here—is it ?"

"It's the cause of it anyhow," said No. 25 with a gulp.

"Belike enough. It sent many a wan to the gaol an' many a wan to the gallows. God help the people."

The convict interrupted his narrative by a wandering fit of reflection, in which he seemed lost for a few minutes.

"You got notice ?" suggested No. 25.

"Yes," said the other, interrupting his reflection, "I got notice. The landlord wanted my farm to add to another man's, or to turn into game-land, or for something or another—it does not make much differ what it's for, when he does want it—does it?"

"No; it does not," said No. 25 emphatically.

"No. Well I wouldn't give it up as long as I could help it. What could I do out of it? Nothing. What could my wife do—she was only twenty-one—turned out av it on to the high road? Or what could the little baby do—just one year old? Or what could I do for aither ov 'em? I tould the landlord all that. I might as well ax a favour from the warder beyant, wid his loaded gun, or from the big stone you see in the river. Out I must go—an' out I did go.

"What we suffered no one knows but ourselves—and God, if He saw it, which I don't think He did, because if He did, He wouldn't permit it. The roof was taken off afore our eyes. The hedge of rose trees was trampled and pulled down, and the rose tree I had planted the morning baby was born, and that we both watered so carefully ever after, and that was doing so finely, was torn up and thrown to wither. Much as baby's own life was torn up. Much as her mother's life was torn up. Just the same. But it took place all the same.

"It was in the month of February too. The weather was cold, and the snow was half meltin' on the ground. Where could I go?—nowhere! What could I do?—nothing! I built a hut with such sticks an' coverin' as I could get in a bit of waste heath near the shore. An' there I lived for some time, workin' about so long as I could get work to do.

"But I soon had to give up work. Mary caught a cold

in the damp of the hut, an' wid the wakeness of havin' but little to eat—an' that little, poor—her strength ran out, like water out av a sieve. So the baby got a cold, too, an' was very bad ; an' the mother, the crathur, bad as she was, kept her in her arms, tryin' to mind her an' keep the life in her, an' I had to try an' mind both.

“ Anyhow, they grew worse an' worse, until Mary was scarcely able to turn in the bed or hould the baby to her breast.

“ One cowl'd evenin' came when there wasn't a spark of fire on the hearth, nor a drop of anything but water in the house. There wasn't milk to make a drop of whey, though I knew she was thirsty for it. People used to give an' give, an' send an' send—though the nearest was a mile off—but people get tired of givin' an' givin', when it's likely to go on for ever, an' they get worn out.

“ I walked about the house, an' about the heath that grew around. I didn't know what to do, or where to get succour and relief. I was in awful agony.

“ ‘ I wish I had a little money for my starvin' family,' I used to say aloud to myself. ‘ A little, a little, only a little ! I wish God or the devil would bear me a helpin' hand. Anythin' to get food and medicine for the famishing crathurs.’

“ I had not eaten anything myself for that day, though the evening was falling—nor the day before. My heart was too full of burning-up just to eat anything—even if I had it.

“ There was no relief to be had outside, as there was nothing but sorrow inside. I came in to see how they were doin', though well I knew how they were doin'. What way could they be doin' but the wan way ?

"But whin I came in I was frightened to see the change that had come over my wife's face. It made the heart stand across in my breast.

"'Are you worse, Mary?' I asked her.

"'I am,' said she; 'have you any drink there?'

"'There is nothing in the house, Mary,' said I, 'but water.'

"'Give me that!' said she. She was speaking at the time lower than a whisper, so that I had to kneel beside her on the ground—she was lying on a shass ov straw—an' bend my face down to her's to hear her.

"She took the drink of water.

"'I think you ought to go for the priest,' said she. 'I feel very bad.'

"'An' who'll mind you and the little one while I'm away, Mary?' said I. 'It's six miles to where the priest lives. Who'll mind you all the time I'm away?'

"'God,' said she feebly. 'God and the Blessed Virgin.'

"Nobody will ever know what I suffered that night. Nobody. I couldn't be ov much use stayin', when I hadn't a bit or a sup to give 'em, the crathurs; but for all that, somehow I couldn't bear to leave 'em alone in the hut that night, in the could an' the dark, an' the wet, an' the hunger.

"I tore myself away to go for the priest. Greater despair, torment, blackness, madness, lay never in any heart than in mine that journey. I ran the whole way. Along the cliffs by the shore, up an' down, up an' down, until I came to the high road; an' then fast as I could through the meltin' snow that lay in the hollow of the cliffs, and through the mud an' the slush of the roads until I came to the priest's house.

"I did not know how wake I was until I reached my journey's end. In my torture and agony, I forgot I had been fastin' two days athout atin' anything.

"I had scarcely given my message to the priest, who knew me well, when I fell in a faint. Afore I went off altogether, I could hear him say to the servant—'This poor fellow seems starvin', look to him until I come back.'

"It was about midnight when I came to. The house-keeper had something prepared for me to eat, but with the wakeness I could not put a morsel into my mouth. I took a glass of spirits from her an' set out to go home agin. She wanted me to wait until mornin', or until the priest came back, but if I had had to walk through fire all the way I'd have gone.

"When I came to the place where I had to leave the road and go across the fields, I met the priest in the dark riding out on the road.

"'Who is that?' said he, as he noticed my form in the dark. 'Is that Phelim?'

"'It is,' said I, 'your reverence. How are they?'

"'They're well, Phelim, my poor fellow,' said he, laying his hand on my shoulder. 'They'll never feel sorrow or pain in this world again. Why didn't you come and tell me how hardly off you war?'

"'Is she better, your reverence?' said I, for I didn't know what he meant. 'Is the little one better?'

"'They are both better,' said he getting off his horse to spake to me. 'Better than ever they could be in this world, for they're both with God.'

"'They're not dead, your reverence?' I said. I could hardly ask she question. The drops of perspiration tumbled

off my forehead, and fell on my hands as I lifted them to my face, as cold as hailstones and as big.

" ' You must bear it, my poor fellow. It is the hand of God, and if He gives troubles in this world, He gives eternal happiness for it in the next. We are in His hands. You must bear with your great troubles. The baby was gone when I went there, and your poor wife died with my hand under her head.'

" I don't know how I left him. I think I ran mad in the dark towards home. I know that I raved and cursed, with my brain on fire, as I ran through the dark—cursed myself, cursed my landlord, cursed earth and heaven.

" I suppose I fell or lay down exhausted, for when I woke up I was lying on the side of the cliff, wet and cowl'd and shiverin'. It was a mornin' like this wan was, and the day was just breakin'. It was then I first saw *him*. I had only begun to stagger along as fast as I could towards home, when I noticed somebody walkin' beside me. I did not much mind, nor did I care. But he kept step for step with me, walkin' when I walked, runnin' beside me when I ran a few steps ; never lavin' me—never once lavin' me !

" I climbed into the Rath that was on the way, to get a few sticks to light a fire when I got home. He gathered some too. I pulled at an old rotten bush that gave way with me. Feeble though I was the whole 'scaugh' gave way with my pull.

" A few coins turned up with the earth. I looked at them an' found they were gold. I thrust my hand down through the soft earth an' found there were more, many more. I didn't know how much more. If there were a million I wouldn't have thought them worth keepin'. I took a few

and then threw the 'scaugh' back again over the place, and thramped on it. I took the little bundle of faggots, and thried to run home with them. You may think it quare, but my whole anxiety was to light a fire to warm the poor things. It often seems quare to myself now, but that's what I had in my head. If I could only light a fire to warm 'em! I couldn't get out of my head the wet straw an' the wet ground, all sodden with the snow, they were lyin' upon. And I was boilin' over with my haste to kindle a fire to keep them warm, even although I knew they were dead.

"I think I must have lost my senses, for I don't remember anything more until I found myself marching through the streets of Ennis a prisoner. I didn't know nor care then what happened me; but I knew afterwards on the thrial.

"The landlord's house—he was bad to many others as well as me—was attacked and burnt down and plundered at daybreak that mornin', and himself burnt in it. You must have heard of that."

"I did not," said No. 25.

"Well it was. There was plenty to swear that I was there. The priest proved I couldn't be, but the others swore I was. Maybe because I was likely to be—because I had raison to be. But what made everyone sure I was was the gold I had in my pocket. How else could it come there but by plunder? An' to make the matter worse, I could not remember myself how it came. I had forgotten it. It was long after, one night dreamin' in my cell, I remembered it. Ay, an' could lay my hand on the place if I were there. But what was the use talkin' about it?"

"And your companion of that night?" asked No. 25.

"Hush!" said the convict with a frightened gesture. "Hush! spake easy. Ever since he comes at times—and watches me. In the night in my cell. In the daytime at my work, pickin' the oakum. I can know when he's in the room in my sleep. Sometimes I can know when he's comin', I feel my heart beginnin' to flutter and beat, and the cowl'd perspiration come out through my face and forehead. Sometimes I leap from my standin' to find him, when I turn my head, beside me, watchin' me. Watchin' me! It's awful!"

The deadly pallor of the man's face bore an expression of profound terror, which was heightened by the fear that manifested itself in his restless and furtive-glancing eyes. There was no mistaking the truth of the convict's story from the earnestness of his words; but there was still less from the terrified indications of his face.

"Did you see your wife and child?"

"No; I don't remember. I think not."

"Did you ever hear from Clare since?"

"Not a word—not a word, for ten years."

"Does he come to you still?"

"Hush! Spake easy! Yes."

"Often?"

"Sometimes often, sometimes not. Spake easier."

"Does he speak everytime?"

A hoarse cry of "Fall in there! Fall in!" from each of the four warders brought the convicts to their legs and into rank quickly, and two of them proceeding along the line relocked the handcuffs.

The men filed once more into the road, and, as before, commenced their renewed weary tramp over the gutters and pools of the high way, on to their destination.

CHAPTER VII.

THE MARCH.

TRAMP, tramp, unceasingly as the soddened feet of the trampers splashed and plashed on their way past houses, villages, mansions, castles; through the afternoon, the evening, and into the dusk. Tramp, tramp, still in silence, without pause or cessation.

"Will it ever end?" Convict No. 25 asks himself as he plods along mechanically, every sense but one of dull fatigue and excessive tiredness dormant in his body. It was like the endless journeys men imagine themselves making when the fever stretches them on a bed of sickness and fires their brain with disordered dreams.

"Will it never have an ending?" He was going asleep as he staggered along, and would have fallen forward, as his heedless foot struck against a stone which he failed to see, but that his companion brought him up with a chuck of the handcuff, and he saved himself further by partly falling against the man preceding him.

"Steady there, No. 25! No breaking the ranks!"

The voice of the warder, shouting menacingly over the beat of the men's feet, woke him to a sense of his position. But the feeling died away again, as the relapsing sense of fatigue—overwhelming fatigue and sleep—seized upon the numb muscles and nerves of his limbs and brain. No power of his will could overcome the sense of sleep that seized him.

Oh! for rest, anywhere. Oh! for a night's sleep—an hour's sleep. He would willingly add another year to his sentence for every hour of rest he was allowed. He moved along without power, mechanically as a machine might, his legs alone moving. From his hips up seemed cast-iron, so little power of motion there was in his frame. No thought of home, no thought of friend or lover rested in his mind. The overwhelming sense of fatigue, the unconquerable desire for sleep, alone filled his brain. There was no room for anything else.

He was sleeping again, and stumbled as before. As he recovered his place a buzz went through the ranks that roused him somewhat. A low sound that seemed so strange in the unbroken silence of the ranks that it woke him a little, and he looked over his foremost neighbour's shoulder.

They were tramping down the hill; and, as he looked, the multitudinous lights of a city flashed before his eyes. Thousands of twinkling lamps were concentrated in one great centre, while to the right and the left they spread in more diminished numbers. They were, at last, within measurable distance of rest.

And so on through Portsmouth, until they were brought up at the huge gate of a huge building. Which gate suddenly opening, they were once more within the walls of a prison. Never did prison seem so grateful yet to human-kind—never was its shelter so acceptable.

They were ushered into a large bare room on the ground floor, completely divested of every kind of furniture. Their handcuffs were again unlocked, and, save the fetters, they were free to do as they pleased. A heap of rations was piled in one corner, from which a warder supplied all who

chose to take. Some, hungry after their long walk, did. Convict No. 25 staggered over to an opposite corner, and throwing himself on the ground, was instantaneously asleep.

He did not think he could have been more than a few moments asleep, when he awoke ; but the clear daylight was streaming in through the barred windows. He felt a dreadful thirst, so great that it parched his mouth and almost prevented him from speaking. He was shivering too, and his teeth were chattering, although his frame felt burning.

A mist seemed overspreading his eyes, through which he could only see vaguely. But he could see the drummer, where he stood with his drum in his hand, whose beat had wakened the sleepers. He could see, too, dimly that the convicts were all gathering themselves to their feet, and he made an effort to do likewise. But he had only climbed to his knees when his head reeled, his strength left him, and he fell helplessly forward.

He was awoke from his torpid condition by finding two of the warders trying to lift him ; but his limp form was unable to stand, and they laid him down again.

"That man is very ill," said one warder to the other.

"He is altogether unable to walk," assented the second.

"What shall we do with him ?"

"Carry him on board."

"But the prison doctor should see him. If he has any dangerous illness, we might get into trouble."

"He has fever, I think ; he is so hot. Feel his hands."

"He is shivering for all that. How he trembles."

All this he heard in a confused sort of way, as if in a dream. Then the voices of the men faded from his ears ;

and he seemed to be again journeying, journeying for ever—on, on, without rest—without end.

"Are you very ill, 25? Would you like a drink? There is water here." He could hear the words, though he failed to know the speaker's voice or to see him. But it was the voice of the Clareman that was speaking to him, and it was his unhampered left hand that was pouring the water into his mouth, spilling it considerably as he did so.

How delightful, even in his stupor, did the refreshing water seem to his parched throat. How like a dew from heaven to his fevered tongue that was so terribly swollen in his head. But it was only for a moment, and he relapsed again into insensibility.

Prison doctor comes and sees him where he lies; bends down over him, and looks at him; takes up his limp hand and feels his pulse.

Prison doctor shakes his head.

"This man cannot go on board," he says, "else he would convert the ship into a lazaretto. Worst type of fever I have seen in my time, and most malignant."

Other convicts stand at some distance looking on. Also stands looking on, the Clareman.

"Send for the Governor," doctor says.

Governor of prison arrives very soon.

"This convict cannot go on board," doctor says. "Bad fever—very bad—must make way for him in some cell in hospital! separate from all the present inmates of prison. Else fever may spread, and lay hold of more than convicts."

"Who will attend him?" Governor asks. "We have no one for the purpose. He does not belong to the prison."

He cannot go on board ; he cannot go into the streets. Men's lives are too precious for that. Convict No. 25 may die himself—probably will ; but the health of the prison—of the Governor and his family, for instance, and of the other officials—must not be endangered. Neither must the health of the town generally be imperilled. Nothing but rigid seclusion will limit this most malignant fever, and confine it to the convict himself.

Governor sees the force of this argument, particularly the first portion ; sees also the growing danger of leaving that senseless lump of humanity there, wherefrom to breed fever, no one knows how soon ; wherefore he again asks the doctor—

“Who will mind him? We have no hands for that purpose. He is not on the prison strength.”

Doctor pauses to think. Clareman standing by, his pale face more pallorous with the fatiguing march of yesterday, and with another day's thick black stubble over his face, looks on. His right hand is still tethered to his ankle, and hangs helplessly down his side, very much as the empty sleeve of a man's coat does, when his arm is off, and it is pinned to his side.

Clareman's eyes wandered in their frightened, furtive way from governor to doctor, and to the huddled-up heap on the ground—then to governor, to doctor, and huddled-up heap again—in never-ending succession.

Finally, he fixes his eyes on the doctor, and, lifting his unhampered left arm and placing it on the doctor's shoulder, said—

“I will.”

Governor looks with astonishment at the black, fettered

creature before him—upon whose coarse grey prison dress the mud of yesterday's march, so thick it is, stands out in strong relief—for adventuring such familiarity with one of the high officials. Verily, so he might; for Clareman, except that he stood upright on two legs, had very little of the appearance of a human being about him. A gorilla or ourang-outang, newly caught, and with a frightened expression in his eyes begotten of his recent capture, would have looked quite as much like a human being.

Doctor, however, looks at him in no such light. He recognises his offer, its genuineness, and its opportuneness. He simply says—

"You will?"

"I will," reiterates Clareman.

"Do you know that he is ill of a most malignant fever, which the chances are a thousand to one he will die of; and, equally, the chances a thousand to one that you will catch and die of. Do you know that?"

Clareman knows that. Has heard the doctor already say so. He don't care. It is all one to him. Will mind him at any rate.

"What countryman are you?" the doctor asks with some expression of—not contempt, but—admiration in his eyes, as he turns around more fully to face the muddy, dishevelled creature before him.

"Countryman? I'm from Ireland," Clareman answers.

"What countryman is he?" nodding his head in the direction of the senseless form before him.

"From Ireland, too."

"Ah!" Doctor thinks he sees a clue to the offer of devotion now.

"How long have you known him?"

"Only through the march yesterday."

"I thought you were forbidden to speak marching."

"At dinner. At rest," Clareman explains.

"Ah!"

Doctor explains to the Governor the good fortune of this offer.

A smith is brought in to strike off the chains of the fevered man, and he is carried away by some convicts to a cell in a remote wing of the building, from which all other convicts are quickly transferred. Following him, with his fetters also struck off, walks Clareman.

Meantime, the other convicts fall in and are locked two and two, as before, and prepare to march. The vessel will sail for Botany Bay to-morrow, and there is no time to be lost. They must go on board to-day.

Fever patient and his attendant, if one or both survive, can go by another vessel in a couple of months. Vessels sail with convicts with pretty certain regularity. If they miss one now they will get another later on. That is, if they live—of which doctor thinks there is very little chance.

These convict ships do sail with pretty certain regularity. There are as many convicted each Quarter Sessions in Ireland as would furnish a cargo for two or three.

For why?

If a man with a sick wife, or sick child, and having no other nourishment to offer, gets a loan of a neighbour's gun to shoot a hare on his neighbour's land, and is caught; is transported. If a man spears a salmon on the river at night—which salmon otherwise would never do good to human creature, but die and rot in the sea—and is caught, he is

transported. If a starving man, with his wife and family down in the fever, perhaps, is tempted to take a lamb from the flocks adjoining, to keep the flickering life in them, he is transported. He is more often hanged ; but the laws having got a shade more merciful now, he is sometimes only transported for life.

Again, if anyone is suspected to be—and suspected mainly because he has reason to be—a Ribbonman, he is transported. The slightest proof, or no proof at all, will suffice for that. If he is out late at night, he is arrested, transported. If he has a pitchfork in his house, one prong of which is broken by accident, he is transported for having arms. That he would be transported for having a fowling-piece or a blunderbuss, goes without saying. And that they are so caught often, and so transported, anyone who knows the passionate fondness of the Irish people, particularly the young men, for fowling-pieces, will have no hesitation in believing. In fine (we are speaking of fifty years ago), if a man is arrested and brought before the Assistant Barrister at Quarter Sessions or the Judge at Assize, and any charge whatever sworn against him, he is transported.

Sometimes, indeed, he is not. Sometimes one of the jurymen makes interest with his fellows in favour of a man, for some reason or another—either that he is a neighbour to whom he is under obligation, or that he has been a servant of his, or a servant of some friend, or for one out of a thousand reasons—and the man is acquitted. For that, again, a jurymen has a grudge against a prisoner, or against his friends, or he has been denounced to him by some friend of his (the jurymen's), and he influences the others against him, and he is convicted. In neither case has the evidence

a pin's weight. The acquittal or conviction depends upon the personal good or ill-will of the jurymen.

And who were these jurors?

In nearly every case they were selected from the Cromwellian farmers spread over the country. We have one county in our mind's eye, in Leinster, in which the same class of men for years upon years, and their fathers before them, formed the only and sole jurors. Assizes after Assizes found them in the jury-box. Coarse, ignorant men, whose private life were scandals to their humbler neighbours, and who availed themselves of the "Coorts" as a reunion for good dinners, plenty of whisky, and foul stories. They all held their farms at low rents, so that they could afford to give ten or twenty or fifty days in each year as jurors. They were of that class of men of whom the yeomanry of '98 were formed—brutal and murderous where their foes were weak, but cowardly and sneaking where brave men opposed them. They lived on the fat of the land; and as "abundance of bread and idleness" led to the sin of Sodom, so over-feeding and idleness begot in these men's hearts passions of lust and murder, and changed them from the semblance of men into human beasts. The maledictions of men, and the wrath of God have fallen upon them, and they have, notwithstanding their cheap farms, in great part, melted from out the land already.

It was no wonder, therefore, that Irish hearts and hearths were desolate, and that mourning often sat throned in many an humble Irish home. It was no wonder that time after time the white sails of the convict ship spread themselves above the Atlantic as they bore their freight of broken hearts and

ruined lives to that dread Botany Bay—the marvel being that in that sorrowful and afflicted land of Ireland the people did not, crushed in every shape and direction as they were, lie down and die !

Oh ! marvellous strength and hope and patience and perseverance of this Irish race ! Oh ! dauntless courage and abiding faith of you, dear sleepers beneath the sod of our Irish graveyards ! who in the penal days of yore held so trustily and sturdily the Irish land for the Irish people !

The heavens be your bed, and the light of glory to your eyes !



CHAPTER VIII.

THE CONVICT CELL.

A BARE, whitewashed cell. A small camp-bed, wherein lies sometimes muttering and raving, sometimes breathing stertorously, a sick man. A small table, on which is a wooden bowl and a wooden spoon. A small low stool, on which sits, with his two hands on his knees, a little black man, looking much smaller, too, than he really is, by reason of his low seat and his crouching position, but with two restless eyes that wander unceasingly from the bed to the little circular hole in the iron shutter through which a gleam of light makes its way in, and through which the treading sentinel outside can at any moment peep and see how things inside are doing.

At the same time on any day for the past three weeks the same tableau might have presented itself to anyone looking into the cell. With eye and ear ready for the

slightest motion on the part of the sick man, Clareman was ever on the alert. His eye was quick to notice the unexpressed wish for a drink, and his hand ready to give it. It was only water, but, perhaps so much the better. There was at least nothing adulterated or dangerous in that.

So, too, when the wearied and burning form wanted a change of position, his restless eyes noticed it at once and Clareman's hand, gentle as a woman's, helped the unconscious form to the desired rest. Lying on the bare floor at night, on the hard boards, his quick ear caught the slightest sound or movement, and he was on his feet at once and ready to attend.

So he had fed and tended the flickering light of life, as it brightened up a little or sank down, as the fever-fire burned along the patient's veins and raged in his brain for weeks.

The crisis had arrived to-day and the fever would leave, or it would bring death as its companion.

Clareman's eye was therefore on the little circular opening in the door, waiting for some shadow to darken it—waiting in fact, for the doctor.

The patient had latterly fallen into a soundless and motionless sleep, which he did not understand and could not account for. Clareman was therefore much perturbed, and his always restless eye revolved with wonderful quickness from bed to door and from door to bed. Finally it fastened on the door as a shadow seemed to cross and darken the opening, excluding the light that entered through it. A key rustled and grated in the lock, and the door opened.

Bidding Clareman a kindly good day in a pleasant, cheerful manner, to which Clareman responded shyly, looking

downwards after the timid manner of one not accustomed to be spoken to, the doctor walked to the bedside, took up the patient's hand and felt his pulse, listened to his breathing, placed his hand on his heart, looked at his watch, and again noted the beats of his pulse.

He laid the hand down again gently, and—to the great surprise and disgust of the two hospital attendants who accompanied him to the door—walked over and shook hands warmly with Clareman—who was watching his motions with quivering attention—very much, indeed, to Clareman's retiring embarrassment.

"He is safe," says he. "The crisis is over. The fever has left him. He will wake without it. He will be very weak, and will need care. I shall see that he gets it. I never saw devotion like yours. It brightens humanity. You have saved his life—whatever it may be worth to him. What was he convicted of?"

"He told me for nothing," said Clareman humbly: his gratitude to the doctor for his good news making him nearly ready to go down and kiss his feet.

"And what are you in for yourself?"

"For nothing," said Clareman with more demonstration of courage.

"Oh, well," said the doctor, laughing; "it ought to be for nothing; for your courage and attention to him should wipe away a thousand offences."

He made some pencil notes in his note-book; and closing it up, and placing it in his breast pocket, said—

"I will not tell you to attend to him—because there is no need, your faithfulness needs no order. But I will send you such nourishment as his weakness requires. You will

give it to him little by little at first, until he gets stronger. But I need not tell you. Your kindness will teach you what to do. I shall call again to-morrow, or if not, the following morning. Good day."

And he passed from the room with a nod to Clareman, as friendly and pleasant as if the convict dress were a court suit, and the red number on the lappel of his coat a diamond order.

Convict No. 25 slept soundly all the evening, slept soundly all the night: and Clareman was awakened when the first light was breaking through the prison window high up, and through the circular opening in the door, by his calling for a drink. Clareman himself had slept little for the past twenty-one days and nights, but he had (the danger over) slept soundly this night. He was on his feet from his bed of boards in a twinkling and by the caller's side.

The convict's eyes settled on him slowly and inquiringly as he took the drink.

"How do you find yourself?"

"Better."

"A little weak, I think."

"I am," said Convict No. 25 wearily, "a little weak."

"You've had a long fit ov it," said Clareman. "It's all over now, thanks be to God! Rest yourself. You'll be all right in a few days."

"Am I long here?"

"Just three weeks."

"Three weeks!" said Convict 25 with a faint attempt at surprise. "I thought it was only yesterday."

"It's three long weeks," said Clareman, "an' you need not say a word it wasn't for ever. You've been very ill."

"Have I? I think I have. I cannot raise my hand."

"Well, you need not raise it. Lie quiet."

"Don't I know you? Where did I see you before?"

"Don't try to remember now. Go asleep again. I'll sit beside you. You're not strong enough yet to speak."

And so covering him up, that the faint light coming in should not fall on his eyes or disturb him in his sleep, he helped him on his side, and the patient was off again, Clareman sitting on the side of the bed all the time, and watching his patient with tender kindness.

Towards evening the latter woke again, much refreshed, but still very weak.

"I saw your face before?" asked Convict No. 25.

"So you did?" said Clareman.

"I forget where," said the former, vaguely trying to remember.

"Don't mind thinking of it now. You'll know time enough."

"I remember now. 'Twas on the march yesterday."

"No; not yesterday. Three weeks ago."

"Ah, yes, you told me this morning, I remember," said the patient. "Was it you attended me all the time?" he asked again, after a pause.

"Yes, I minded you. 'Twould be the poor mindin' you'd get from the people here."

The patient turned on him with a look in which thanks and gratitude and affection were blended.

"Don't mind that now," said Clareman, as he noticed the look; "it's only what wan man ought to do for another—any Irishman, at any rate."

"Three weeks!" said the patient; "it was a long time.

For a stranger, too. I hope I can repay it some day, though," as his eye fell on the red number on the convict's dress, recalling his own position to him, "it's very unlikely."

"It *is* unlikely," assented the other. "For ten years—not three weeks, not three months, not three years, but ten long years ; in sickness, or in sorrow, in lonesomeness—or—or in worse," said he, as the old frightened look came into his eyes, "I never heard one word kinder than a curse, nor got a drink of water that I did not crawl out an' get for myself."

The look of fear in the frightened eyes again brought to the patient's recovering memory the Clareman's strange story, told at the dinner hour, when they halted by the stream.

"Are you ever tormented now?" he asked.

"No, not lately. Speak easy."

"Never since?"

"Only once."

"Once—when?"

"The first night."

"Here?"

"Here."

"In this place?" said Convict No. 25, lifting his eyes to the barred window, and to the iron door, and to the otherwise blank and solid walls.

"In this place, as he came into many a place like it afore."

"Did he speak?"

"Speak! No."

"Did he stay long?" asked Convict No. 25, after a pause, in which he began to feel a shade of alarm grow upon himself.

"A long time. Standin' there afore me! Lookin' at me. Always lookin' at me. He went away when you called for a drink, an' I got up to give it you. I couldn't stir afore that."

"But never since?"

"No, never since. But don't ask me any more about it," said he in a whisper, as if some invisible enemy were at his back. "I don't like it."

"Well, you've been a good friend to me at any rate," said Convict No. 25; "and it's hard but I'll have some chance of returning it. I'm stronger than you, I think."

"You are, indeed," said Clareman with a sigh. "Ten years in gaol—most of it shut up in a dark cell—does not leave a man much strength of mind or body."

"I mean I will when I grow well, as please God, I will," said the patient, correcting himself. "What is your name?"

"My name," said Clareman. "My name? What is it? Shure I must know it. I'll tell you in a minit," added he, thoughtfully, as he tried to remember. "I'll have it in a minit. It's on the top ov my tongue. It's ten years since I was axed that afore. My number is 37, but my name," he paused again reflectively.

"Oh, I have it now," he added, in a burst of thought, "I knew it was Phelim something, but I couldn't remember what. It's only by thinkin' of my poor wife's name I could remember it. Her name was Mary Rorke. My name is Phelim Rorke. Say 'Phelim Rorke,'" added he—"it's ten years since I heard it—till I see how it sounds."

"Phelim Rorke," said the patient, with a smile which, even in his weakness, he could not repress.

"It *does* sound well, I think," said Clareman, as he

listened eagerly for the sounds, "but it sounds sthrange. I don't think I ever heard it sound like that long ago. Is it a nice name?"

"It is nice name, and a good name, and what's better, the name of a good man," this time repressing the smile which naturally rose to his lips.

"Because I always thought," pursued Phelim, "that Mary Rorke was the sweetest name I ever heard. It seemed to come next to the Blessed Virgin's."

"So it is a sweet name," assented Convict No. 25, whose thoughts almost instantaneously reverted to another name which arose in his mind. This set him into such a vein of thinking that for some time a dead silence ensued. Both were probably occupied with their own reflections, so akin in sorrow, though in all else so widely divergent.

"*My* name is Kevin Moore," said Convict No. 25, recalling with an effort his mind from the scenes and memories on which it had been dwelling.

"That's strange now," said Phelim, "for my wife's name—her maiden name—was Mary Moore."

"Well, that's another bond between us," said Kevin, with some slight degree of airiness in his manner. "And from this day out——"

"Would you mind callin' 'Phelim Rorke' again," said the Convict earnestly, interrupting him. "I want to see whether I'd know myself by it. It's so long since I heard it. Ten years, you know."

"Certainly," said Kevin. "Phelim——"

"No, no. Wait until I stand wid my back to you at the end of the cell. Now call," said he, as he assumed that position.

"Phelim Rorke!" said Kevin.

"Call it again," said the other.

"Phelim Rorke!"

Phelim turned round, walked back depressedly, and re-seated himself on the side of the bed.

"No; I wouldn't know myself by it," said he, "only that it was Mary's name—the light of glory to her!—I wouldn't know it was mine. It's so long since I heard it, you know. Ten years! Think of them! Ten years! Never anything but 37—always 37. How could I know myself by it now?"

"It isn't easy," said Kevin, who was reflecting within himself whether the day would ever come to him when the sound of his own name would become strange and unfamiliar to him. It was with something of a shudder he thought of such a contingency.

"At any rate, from this day out," said he, breaking off this gloomy reflection, "Phelim, we're to remain sworn friends. You have saved my life, and you have tied me to you by the strongest ties of gratitude and affection."

"Don't! Don't spake like that," said Phelim. "It softens me. I don't think I am the same man at all for the past three weeks. An' I feel worse since you got well enough to spake. It's like to me as if I was a little boy again, and heard people talkin' to me. It's ten years since I talked so much to anyone. Always 'you there, 37! D—n you! why don't you stand straight?' or '37 I see you! Blow your eyes, why don't you pick your oakum?' or 'why don't you hammer that jumper better?' or 'did you never handle a crowbar before, you lazy Irish ——!' Them was always the cry of the warder," continued Phelim, "an' God knows they wor like music in my ears—bad as they wor—when

I'd come out after forty-eight hours bread and water, in a darkened cell—athout a stim of light, an' as silent as if it was, ay miles, down under the ground."

"They never put me there" said Kevin.

"They put me often enough there," said Phelim.

"What used you do?"

"What used I do? Nothin'. What did I ever do to get sentenced at all? Nothin'. But sometimes they'd put me in because I was so sick—so blind with sickness—that I couldn't see the oakum afore me, or so wake I couldn't hould the jumper or the crowbar in my hand. More times, maybe, I'd be thinkin' of home—God help me! as if I had a home to think of—an' would forget to salute the warders. Or, maybe, ov a night whin I wouldn't sleep a wink until mornin'—an' that was two or three times every week—an' then I might sleep so heavy that I wouldn't hear the call; or, maybe, I'd be so blind and wake wid sickness I couldn't find my clothes—though, God knows, I hadn't far to go to find 'em—or whin I got 'em didn't put 'em on me in time to be out wid the rest. But anyhow 'twas always forty-eight hours on bread an' water. An' always in a darkened cell, wid not a stim o' light, an' silent as if it wor a thousand miles under ground."

Kevin looked at him with a feeling of deep sympathy. They were indeed untold horrors to have endured for ten long years. What wonder that brooding fancies arose in the man's mind? Nay, the wonder was that any human brain could stand such treatment—that the light of reason and intelligence held its place at all during these years of suffering.

"An' always," pursued Phelim, as his mind unconsciously

warmed with these dreadful memories and grew excited, "always *he* used to come to me there. I think I never was in that darkened silent cell that he didn't come to me. On an' off—on an' off. Black as the cell was I could always see him. I could always know aforehand he was comin'."

He shrouded his eyes with his hands as if to shut out the dreaded object.

To divert his thoughts from it, Kevin said—

"Phelim !"

"Yes."

"That convict ship—did she sail?"

"She did."

"And the rest, did they go?"

"They did."

"What will they do with us—when I get well?"

"Send us in another."

"Are you sure? Who said so?"

"The doctor."

"The doctor! Was there a doctor here then?"

"There was; came every day, too."

"He was not bound to do that?"

"Bound to do that!" said Phelim, with contempt. "Av coorse he wasn't. All he was bound to do—or any ov'em—is to let the crathures die as fast as they can. They think, maybe, it's the best thing for them—and, if they do, they're right. But, whether they do or do not, they do it—most ov'em. But he came every day."

"He must be a good fellow."

"The best," said Phelim, laconically. "He'll be here to-morrow, and you will see him. Go to sleep. It's growin' dark, and you've been talkin' too much."

With which suggestion Kevin agreed ; and his companion, after helping him to turn into an easier position, threw himself down in his usual corner, and, curling himself into a knot, went to sleep also.

I don't know whether, if it were worth an angel's while ever to turn into a convict cell, or into this convict cell in particular—which, considering all the trouble and swearing that was employed to convict its inmates, the relief it was to the landlords to be rid of them, and the solemnity that the “*eminent Judge*” used in sentencing them, is perhaps not likely ; but, if he did, I wonder whether he looked with any degree of favour on that little human entity, curled up in a corner, and recorded his three weeks' work in the angelic recording book ?

I wonder, further, if, passing thence to the mansion of my Lord Mortgagor or Sir Francis Haymarket, he found any one thing in the whole lives of that noble lord and that right hon. baronet to match the ready and unselfish aid and tenderness accorded by Convict No. 37 to Convict No. 25 ? I trow not.



CHAPTER IX.

THE RUINED CASTLE.

THAT ancient ruin, standing on an elevation in the bog, through which the sunlight gleamed, making its ivy-covered walls sparkle with glintings of gold, as we saw it from the terraces of Grangemore Castle one evening, is before us as we wend our way along the solid road, unbordered by wall at either side, which led to it in the days when banners waved from its donjon, and brave men and fair ladies rode from under its now ruined archway.

A procession is even now passing along the road preceded by cries ; but the cries are cries of wailing, "keening," in fact, for the procession is a funeral ; of which, even if the cries did not inform us, we might be otherwise assured by the coffin, resting on its bier, carried on the shoulders of four men, which, with constant shifting of its bearers, has been its manner of carriage for the four miles it has passed.

Entering the graveyard, which slopes down from the ruin in a rough, declivitous sort of way, the processionists scatter themselves over it ; the coffin, preceded by some friends who repeat the *De Profundis*, is carried first to a smaller ruin called "the chapel," where, tradition has it, the dust of a great abbot reposes, whose name has been all but lost, but of whose great sanctity stories still survive. Here the prayers are said again, the bier is once more raised, and the procession of mourners moves on to the grave wherein the poor remnant of mortality is to be laid. As the dust falls

with hollow sound on the coffin, shutting out for evermore the form lying within from human sight—and, in a few years, from human remembrance—the mourners' cries arise again. So they have sounded on similar occasions there for thousands of years ; so they will continue to sound till the great consuming fire lights up our globe—and the race of man vanishes.

“If the landlords don't turn 'em all off—which they're very likely to do, if they go on as they're goin'—long afore that,” was the practical comment upon this moralising, indulged in by one of the processionists, as a number of farmers, young and old, sat on a tombstone, listening to the “keen ” of the wailers.

The commentator was a tall man, thin and worn and sad-looking, whose quiet, resigned manner showed somehow in very great contrast with the firmness that his square face, heavy eyebrows, and massive chin would be expected to display. But it might have been hardship or sorrow that had thinned his face, as it thinned his body, and brought out these marked angularities of countenance. Or, again, it might be token of a latent strength and firmness of character, waiting some favourable opportunity or emergency for development.

“That's thrue enough for you, Darby Kelly !” said another, with a promptness which showed how much the remark ran with the current of his thoughts ; “that's thrue enough, for sorra wan will soon be left to have a funeral, or to come to a funeral, if things go on as they're goin'.”

“I hear Sir Hardinge had a walker on the lands of Carrigbrae yesterday.”

"An' three or four Scotch graziers lookin' at it," said another.

"Ay, an' what's more, wan ov them has taken it—the whole townland. An' what's more, has marked out the place for the new mansion he's goin' to build. An' what's more, he'll have it in his hands clear of tenantry this day twelve-months. He says it's fine land for young stock and for sheep-raisin'. Faix, an' he's right; though may be it would be better in the long run to see the cows, and the horses, and the hens, and the ducks, and the hay an' oats, an' whate—and the Christians—growin' on it," said Darby Kelly, in a depressed, complaining sort of way.

"You're right enough there," said the man who had first spoken in response to him; "but you're wrong in sayin' that the Scotchman is going to get that—at laste a new Scotchman. The steward had that promised to him long enough afore Kevin Moore an' his mother an' sister wor turned out ov it."

"I know better nor that," said Billy, with emphasis. "The steward was only promised that farm. But the new man has taken the whole townland—that farm as well as the rest. It's all to be turned into one big farm. I know that for certain."

A variety of exclamations burst from the hearers as they heard this news, each one expressing his surprise according to his own fashion, and according to the intensity of the sensation which struck him.

"But sure that can't be. It's impossible that can be, Darby. Why there's five or six families on that townland. What would be done with them?"

"What would be done wid 'em?" said Darby, re-echoing

the question. "What would be done wid 'em but turn 'em out. Turn 'em out to beg, or go to the poorhouse, or rot. Or do as was done with Kevin Moore, thransport 'em; that's the handiest way, bekaise then there's no danger to the landlord and no cost to the rates."

"I can't and I won't believe," said a very young man who had not spoken before, "that they are going to be turned out, or that Sir Hardinge has let the townland. Why, it would be murder—it would be death to the creatures."

"Hould your tongue, Charley," said Darby, sharply; "if you can't spake sense don't spake at all. Wasn't the townland of Carrick cleared? Wasn't the townland of Ballyclare cleared? Where are the people that lived there snug and comfortable? Some dead, some in the workhouse, some in America. Is there wan stone upon another where they lived? Not wan. Isn't the grass growin' where the bedroom was, and the parlour was, and the kitchen was, and the hearthstone was? Don't the bullocks and the heifers graze over 'em? What's to prevent 'em doin' now what they did then? What's to hinder 'em levellin' Carrigbrae as they levelled Carrick and Ballyclare? Nothin'; nothin' that I can see at any rate."

"Well, all I can say," said another farmer, who sat on a tombstone, silently listening to what was going on, and apparently intent on the music he was making by kicking the iron tip of his boot against the marble side of the tomb, "it's an awful state of things that people can't be let live where they were born, an' their fathers afore 'em; but that they must be runnin' the chance always of being hunted out like wild dogs, whenever cattle, or sheep, or stock of any kind is fetching high prices."

"Aye," said another, "an' they payin' now an' all their lives, the highest penny for the land. Workin' late and early, mornin', noon, an' night, to make the rent. Makin' butter—not to eat it, but to sell it ; raisin' fowl—not to eat 'em, but to sell 'em ; everything but the praties alone goes for the landlord. The praties and the buttermilk. That's all we have. An' yet we won't be left even that, if there's a chance of more bein' made by turnin' us out. Oughtn't they be glad to get well paid for the land, and let us live in peace ?"

"The time will come, believe me," said Darby Kelly, "when they'll be glad to get high rents, or low rents, or any rents. And glad to be allowed to live at all. But they have it their own way now, an' so much the worse for us. For you may think and say what you's like, but what happens on one townland will happen on another ; and afore this time twelve-months you'll not see a stick nor a stone in Carrigbrae, nor a single living thing, except shorthorns."

"Sure no one in the world 'ud have the heart to turn out Maury Oge an' her mother an' the little ones. Where would you see a finer family from Maury down, or where would you see the like of herself ?" said Charley again.

"That's true," broke in the silent man again, suspending the tapping of his heel where his foot hung down against the stone. "That's true. Divil a finer in Westmeath or in Ireland. The man that 'ud turn her out, and lave her athout a roof over her, mustn't be a man at all, but the divil in a man's likeness."

"Whist ! boys. There's the prayers. The coffin is covered."

The group assembled looked in the direction of the

grave ; and seeing those assembled there with their hats off repeating the concluding prayers, took their own off in reverence, and silently engaged in prayer until they saw the mourners put on their hats again, the prayers being over.

“That poor fellow is in his long home at last. God be merciful to him !” said one of the former group. “All his thrubbles are over. There’ll be no breakin’ *his* rest to-night.”

“Aye, God forgive him his sins !” said Darby ; “he’ll be quiet an’ lonesome to-night under the clay. But he got a fine long life an’ a comfortable one. And whin a man gets that an’ lives a decent honest life—what more does he want or can he expect in this world ? He gets up in the mornin’ to see the sun lighting up the hedges, and the meadows, and the crops around him ; he sees the dew glistenin’ on the grass, an’ hears the lark singin’ in the sky ; he comes home in the evenin’ pleasant an’ happy, and he sleeps sound all night. He has Sunday to rest himself ; and he has an odd fair day to meet his neighbours an’ see old friends, an’ enjoy himself. What more can any man want in this world ?”

Verily, nothing more. In the quiet primitive life which Darby had pictured for his gossippers was the *summum bonum* of human happiness. A lifetime so spent might pass along the even tenor of its way—through its morning, and its noon, and its evening—until the darkening shadows of that night comes, that comes inevitably to all, wherein no man can work, without leaving pain of regret or remorse behind it.

“It would be fine enough ; God knows, none of us would ask better, if it weren’t for the unaisiness wer’e in with these

cursed blaguards ov landlords. There can't be a Sunday evening where there's a song or a dance for the young people, but when they're goin' away, and they say, rejoicin', to wan another, 'that we may be as well off this time twelve-month,' that they don't say in their own minds, 'God help us, there is not much chance ov that!' If there's a little amusement here or there, an' a pleasant harmless night is spent, the first thing, when it's over, that occurs to a body's mind is—'I wonder what'll the landlord think of the farm. Will he lave us in it, or will he give us notis next half-year?' That's always it! The landlord is before an' behind in the people's thoughts. His very name would poison the happiness of any gathering. The curse ov——"

"Stop that, Charley. I tould you afore to spake sinse, if you spake at all. Charley, you said some things now that had sinse enough in 'em. But cursin' isn't sinse. You might curse 'em (or bless 'em aither) for anything one ov 'em cared. They'd spend more money for a show-off in one night in London than they'd make by turnin' out wan ov these poor families to starve, an' die, an' rot. Cursin' indeed! Much they care for cursin'! If cursin' wud do 'em any harm, they've got more curses from ruined crathers than 'ud make the skies melt an' come down on their heads in a burnin' shower. But the skies won't come down on their heads in a burnin' shower; nor nothin' else 'll happen 'em in this world; an' they'll go on turnin' out an' persecutin', if they're let—if they're let."

"An' to be sure they'll be let. Who's to hinder 'em? Can anyone tell me who's to hinder 'em?" said Darby again, as no one spoke.

"Couldn't we join together an' take the law agin 'em?"

inquired Charley thoughtfully. "If we got a great counsellor from Dublin ——"

"The law!" said Darby, "the law! Who made the law but themselves? Who made it so that they can turn every livin' bein' out but themselves? Who makes it still but themselves? This Act of Parliament, an' that Act of Parliament, an' t'other Act of Parliament. An' if there's any weakness in the law anywhere, so far as they're consarned, can't they make another Act of Parliament at wanst that'll stop the hole? To be sure they can, an' to be sure they will."

"Aye," said the silent man, still profoundly finding out the echoes in the tombstone with his boot heel, "an' who works the law but themselves? Who sits on the bench but themselves? Who says what must be done but themselves? Pay a big counsellor in Dublin to come down an' make a speech! Well, he comes an' makes a speech. The court-house is crowded to listen to him. The landlords are as glad to listen to him as anyhody else, because it's so seldom they hear a good speech. The bench is crowded as well as the court. But how does it end? I'll tell you. The great lawyer finishes his great speech, an' puts his law books into his bag, and hurries to catch the mail-car to Dublin. The people are ready to fall at his feet, he's said such fine things about 'em. Very well. They cheer him through the streets. But what do the landlords on the bench do? They whisper on the bench for a little while together, or they go into the magistrates' room, where you can hear em' laughin' and enjoyin' themselves; an' they come out in half an hour or so, an' they say:—'That man must go to gaol for trespass'; or, 'we send him to gaol with hard labour for this, that, or the other!' Just the very same as if there wasn't a great

lawyer within forty thousand millions ov miles of the place."

"That's just the very way, Bryan," broke in Darby. "That's the very way. For why? Do you know why? I'll tell you. Whatever these men on the bench think is right, that's the law. It's athin their discretion. That's the way ov it. Much the very same as to say—Whatever you have raison to think as fair men is fair, the law will back you up in that! What do these villains think is fair? To root the people out. When they are rooted out to send them—for fear ov 'em—to gaol or to thransportation. An' the law backs 'em up in that. Be coorse, if they make a mistake you can go to a higher coort agin 'em at as much expense as id pay your rent for the year, an' more; an' maybe the Dublin coort 'll be wid you, an' maybe it 'll be agin you. But if it be for you asself, they won't have as much as a farthing to pay. It's not to be done; it's set aside, an' that's all about it. They may do the same thing the very next coort-day wid somebody else, an' the same expense 'ud have to be gone through to get it set aside—athout costing them a farthin'. There's a Castle lawyer in Dublin paid for defendin' 'em alone. An' the taxes that pays *him* the crathurs that bring 'em into coort have to pay, as well as everything else. So there's the law, and there's what it 'll do for you!"

"That's all very fine," said Charley again; "bud what's to be done? You're both showin' us what can't be done. This can't be done, an' that other can't be done. Will you now tell us what can be done? We can't all wait until we're turned out, an' when we are turned out, wait until the landlords get us arrested, an' thried, an' thransported."

"Now you're speakin' a little sense. Charley," said Darby

approvingly. "That's what we ought to see about. An' to see about, too, afore it's too late. I suppose you were often in a haggard when they wor pullin' down a stack o' wheat to thrash it?"

"Ay, a thousand times," said Charley.

"Well, you've seen the rats jump out ov it according as the sheaves came off it?"

"Ay, lots of times," answered Charley again.

"Well, did you ever see a rat that was flying for it's life an' was chased into a corner? What did the rat do? You've seen it often. When it was chased into that corner, what did it do? Lie down to be kilt? No; it turned and fought for its life, and got off safe often. Where would you see rats hunted the way we're hunted? The landlord says—'Go out! Leave your home.' You go to law with him. He's the lawmaker. He sits on the bench. If you go to law wid him, you go into the coort afore him—afore him an' his friends, who are as bad, if not worse, than himself. That's how it is."

"Well," said Charley, "we all know that. Knew it as well afore you spoke as we do now. But your talk don't put us much farther for'ard on the road. Not a bit. What's to be done? That's what I want to know."

"Charley's right, Darby," said the silent hammerer on the tombstone. "Charley is right. Talk is chape, but what's to be done? Tell us that, an' you'll tell us what we'd like to hear."

"For my part," said Charley, "I'd rather be carried into the graveyard here any day, an' see everyone belongin' to me go afore me, than be turned out. We'd be at rest here an' free from thrubbles; but what rest could there be for us,

scattered and wanderin' like paupers—not like, but actually paupers—up an' down the country side, so long as the lan'-lords and the polis didn't arrest us an' clap us in gaol. Look at Kevin Moore. Where was there ever a young fellow like him in this county or any other county in Ireland? Nowhere. Where was there ever such a nice, handsome, accomplished girl as his sister? No, not goin' to any chapel in the land. Where was the widow so respected by high an' low, through a long life, as their mother? Yet look at what happened! The mother died on a stranger's flure; the daughter gone out ov the country for shelter in a strange land, an' the son thransported."

"You're sayin' now yourself what you blamed me for a minit ago," said Darby. "Don't we all know that athout bein' tould it over an' over again."

"If I am it's only to find out what's to be done to save ourselves. I wouldn't waste ten minutes talkin' here if it wasn't for that."

"Charley's right again," said the hammerer. "That's what we all want to know."

"Very well," assented Darby; "but who'll tell us? We're all agreed it's hard for ourselves an' our childer to be hunted out to die on the high road. Aren't we?"

A general chorus of "We are so," "That's the truth anyway," attested their firm belief in that in whatever else they might differ.

"An' that it would be better to die in our own houses than on the roadside or in gaol or in Botany Bay. Aren't we?"

Yes, certainly; nobody there but would rather face death at home, than the worse than death of being turned out.

"Well, boys, that bein' so, what are we goin' to do?"

There was considerable more difficulty in giving an answer to this question—so much difficulty, indeed, that no one present was prepared to answer it, and all remained silent.

"Somethin' must be done, you know. Now or never; there's not a minit to be lost, for the clearances will go on."

Still no one could or did propose a solution to the problem, which was not surprising, for it might have puzzled all the eminent diplomatists that ever ranged themselves around the tables of all the numerous Conferences called to settle the Eastern question to settle this one.

"Well, boys, I tell you what!" said Charley, "this is not a question easy to answer at once. It requires to be thought over. Think it over to-night, each and every one. You will all be here to-morrow making the turf for Sir Hardinge?"

Yes. They all would. Ground down as they were with rents, and possessed with the sure knowledge that they were doomed to be cleared from their holdings and exterminated—as one of the speakers put it, like rats from a stack of wheat in a haggard—they were still bound to cut, and clamp out, and dry, and carry home when finished, the landlord's turf, as they had to do, free of recompense, likewise any farming or other operations he wanted carried out.

Free of recompense and free of thanks.

Yes; they would be all there to-morrow. Many more, too. Hundreds. For who dared refuse? Who dared be absent? badly as their services might be needed on their own farms at home.

"Very well. You won't be going home until it's dusk. You will work longer for him than you would work for your-

selves. Small blame to you for that either! Well, what I say is: all that are here, and as many others as you can trust, and that are in the same boat with yourselves, let them meet, before going home, in the old castle above—in the dining-hall—you know where that is—and we can talk it over. It will be a fine moonlight night."

"That's a good advice, Charley. And let each man have his mind made up what he's goin' to do, or what he thinks ought to be done," said Darby.

"I think so," said the hammerer, getting off his seat on the tombstone. "It's sound advice. There's no use talkin' longer here."

"Well, that's somethin' to have done," said Charley, as the party scattered—some to go through the bog-road homewards; some to go and kneel, and say a prayer at the headstones, whereunder the graves of their deceased relatives were.



CHAPTER X.

THE LEAGUE OF THE WHITEFEET.

THE day was a bright and pleasant one when the farmers and their sons and labourers attended at the bog of Mullawnmore to make the landlord's turf.

The surroundings—I speak in a mental way—were not of the class to invite much amusement, or to create a spirit of fun in the hearts of those assembled. To begin with, they were working without recompense. Without the recompense even that might be suggested by a dinner. Who was there

in Grangemore Castle that would dream of such a thing, or go to the trouble of it? They had to bring their dinners with them. But they had, and their fathers before them, been accustomed to do "duty-work" for Sir Hardinge and *his* father before him, so that there was nothing new, and, therefore, nothing strange in that. The probability—which rumour rapidly developed into certainty—of evictions being carried out—no one knew where the first might fall or commence—was what weighed, with all its uncertainties and dangers, most on their hearts.

There is something, however, in the Irish character that makes it utterly impossible, in the presence of a crowd or amongst a number of their kind, to allow feelings of melancholy or evil bodements to exist. These feelings are reserved for more solitary times, then to crop up in their full force and effect. Possibly, it is this that makes an Irish crowd so joyous, and that makes them so love races and other gregarious amusements. Possibly, also, that makes them affect so much the great cities of the New World, where, in the midst of the crowd, they can forget their private troubles. For, curiously, the loneliest islander that ever dwelt off the Western coasts would prefer to live in one of the cities of the New World to owning an estate in the backwoods.

It was very likely this innate character in our people that has caused them to exist as a race or a people at all through the long ages of sufferings and persecutions, that made them so pleasant this day, and that made the bog lands of Mullawnmore ring with laughter and jokes.

Likely, also, the fine day, and the beauty of the surrounding country, and their own healthy frames had something to do with it. It was not easy for a young man with the life-

tide coursing in healthy flow through his body, impelled thereto by the exercise he was engaged in, to look up at the beauty of the summer sky, at the bright green of the landscape around him, at the waving meadows that bordered the bog-side, even at the beautiful white flowers of the *canavaun* that on their long stalks contrasted so with the pitch-black banks of the cut-away bog, and feel sorrow.

So that the day passed with pleasantness and good humour. The slane-turf was cut by strong hands and carried off. The mould was cut down and thrown into the water, where it was trampled on by bare-legged, bare-footed youths until it was reduced to the consistency of pulp. This was flung up with scoops on to the dry bank, where it was taken up by men who, with their hands, kneaded it into that description of fuel known as hand turf, and carried it to the green bank to dry.

It was pleasant work, though the day was warm, and any accidental passer-by would certainly have thought it was a festive gathering that was being carried on. He would have been very slow to associate it with compulsory work done by serfs for their master without recompense or thanks.

So they worked with cheerful good humour, in which jokes and pleasantry were bandied about until dinner-time, when they all adjourned to the green banks to take their dinner. The green banks being merely a thin coating of grass growing over the dry and warm turf beneath, formed a very clean, pleasant, and comfortable place whereon to lounge during the dinner-hour.

The dinner-time must, however, be distinguished from the dinner-hour, for the former lasted but half the latter time. The dinner was not of a very elaborate character. There

was but little of the roast beef and plum pudding which distinguish our over-fed English neighbour's fancy.

It consisted merely of, in some cases, bread and new milk, in other cases bread and hard-boiled eggs. Small diet people would say, who believe that gourmandising is necessary to life. And this was as good, or perhaps better, than they had on any other day except Sunday.

Yet it was marvellous to see the stalwart, lithe, active frames that grew up under that regime.

Young fellows, eighteen, nineteen, and twenty years of age—broad shouldered, lithe-limbed, five feet ten in height and straight as an ashen plant—were there by the dozen. In cities we are accustomed to associate that age with what is stunted, boyish, and immature ; but in the bright air, healthy exercise, and untainted race of the workers of Mullawnmore, they rapidly developed into muscular manhood. And, whilst the broad shoulders, powerful arms, and lithe limbs of these young fellows betokened the strength of their manhood, the bright, pleasant eye and face, fair as a girl's, showed the health and almost primeval innocence that reigned within. A nation self-governed, and proud of a race of healthy citizens, would have cherished and preserved this stock of people as the apple of its eye, as the life-giving source of the world. The English Government and their alter-ego, the landlords, were devising means whereby to drive them out from the land. And, looking at it from their point of view, they were right—quite right ! Two parties so utterly antagonistic cannot live on the same land together. Impossible. Therefore one or other must go. The landlords, to do them justice, braced themselves up to their legitimate conclusion, and declared the people

must go. And they set themselves about it with right excellent effect.

But the people? Well, the people had early in life been taught of a high ordinance whereby it was commanded to give every one his own, and of another equally high ordinance whereby it was ordered to obey your superiors. Were not the rents the landlords demanded their own? and were not the landlords and the Government their superiors? Certainly. So they were told with all the solemnity of religious teaching, Sunday after Sunday.

Some spirits, however, maddened by the sight of the dreadful condition of the people; of the ruin and havoc that these clearances were making with the old race; of the sorrow that fell causelessly on young girls and innocent children; of the dreadful fate—worse than hell—that awaited their after-life in foreign cities, began to doubt after all if the theology or morality so persistently preached to them was absolutely correct.

To begin with: "How had the people come into possession of the land, two hundred, three hundred, four hundred years ago?"

"By robbery, confiscation, or plunder."

"Well, that did not give them an honest hold then. Does it now?"

"Has God gone asleep during that time, and waked up to recognise it as right now?" If not, can anyone decide it to be right? Can even the Government, or an Act of Parliament, make it right? Does it fall, is it a case that comes at all, under these Divine ordinances?

In some such fashion as this they reasoned to the people. And, unlike many prophets, their seed fell on ground not

stony and barren, but fertile with the tears of long suffering and affliction.

And it so happened that one of these prophets strolled down through the laughing diners on the grassy turf-bank, towards the conclusion of the dinner.

No one would have taken him for a prophet coming to teach a new theology to the people, who looked at him. For he was a straight, tall-looking youth, whose very slightness made him look taller than he was. He was the village schoolmaster. He was dressed neatly in black, which added perhaps to the exceeding pallor of his face. This latter was indeed excessively pale, except when a slight flush on the cheek showed itself. But there was in his eyes, as he looked around or nodded to those whom he met, an amount of brightness, a rare glance of pleasant intelligence, a glad look of recognition, so open and so friendly, that made people forget the deathly pallor of his face, and think it truly handsome. If to that we add a readiness in pleasant bantering, a quickness in good-humoured repartee ; the fact that two out of every three in the place were in some degree or another, by near or remote degrees, his relations ; that old women had shook their heads often after him, when he passed with a friendly greeting, and declared "he would never live to comb a grey head"—a quaint prophecy that uttered in the country in reference to some young person, sounds with the force of doom ; and that he was barely twenty-two—it is no wonder that there was a kindly welcome for him as he moved up towards the workers.

"That's a good jump, Charley," said he to one young fellow, who, stripped to his shirt and pants, was after making a terrific leap in his bare feet from one turf bank to the

other, over the intervening space of bog-water—pretty much as an active fellow might run in his bare feet at and clear the locks of a canal.

The young fellow addressed, having landed the other side, tossed his head up pleasantly, squared himself erect, and said with a confident laugh, as of one who knew his strength and suppleness—

"I think so, Mr. Canavan."

"Does he call that a good jump, Mr. Canavan?" said another young fellow, similarly attired, coming down to the bank in his bare feet, and taking note of the distance across. "Look at this!"

He ran back, turned round, ran for the jump again, and, lifting himself clean into the air, flew over the cavern of bog-water with the lightness of a deer.

"Oh, that's nothing! Watch this, Mr. Canavan! Watch this!"

And another, jumping up from his recumbent position, ran up to the spot, tightened his belt around him, and essaying the jump, cleared it too.

The emulation produced by this extended itself to the rest, and in a few minutes a dozen others had set the marks of their white feet on the opposite bank.

"That's good work, boys; that's fine jumping; I don't think I ever saw better," said the prophet approvingly, with a smile.

"Ah, yes, Mr. Canavan; that was aisy enough. That was jumping down-hill. To leap back will be jumping up-hill. Let me see who'll follow me there! Stand aside for a minit, boys! Clear the way!"

Through the passage thus formed Charley faced the jump

upwards ; took a short run ; placed his foot on the bank, and, with a prodigious force of muscle, landed on the other side. He had not assured himself altogether of his standing, for it was with much exertion and waving of arms that he prevented himself from falling backwards into the bog-water that filled for a great depth the interval between.

"Only middling enough that was !" said his successor in the first leap, with good humoured sarcasm. "Clear the way for me, boys !"

And with step light as the fleeing roe, he ran to the leap, and landed solidly and firmly a couple of feet in on the further bank.

In which he was followed with more or less success by the others, some of them landing well in, and some on their hands and knees, or falling on their breasts against the yielding bank.

"You're training them all up to beat yourself," said Mr. Canavan pleasantly. "It would not be the first time people did that, Charley."

"Not yet, Harry Canavan. Not yet, anyhow. Their mothers 'll have to feed 'em a little longer before they can do that," said Charley with some embarrassment at his late partial defeat, but with perfect consciousness of his superiority.

"I don't think they will," said his nearest rival, "I am able to jump any man on the bog to-day."

"Well," said Charley, in answer to the note of defiance, "there was only one in the whole country that could come up to me or bate me at leapin' or wrestlin' an' that was Kevin Moore. Now that he's gone—poor fellow—I am prepared to take his place, and jump or wrestle any man here or elsewhere. Who'll take me up?"

"I will," said his opponent.

"All right; we'll try it out this minute," said Charley, whose good humour and high spirits were rapidly degenerating into passion and vehemence; "on the bog here now, in presence of all."

"No," said the prophet, gently interfering, when he saw that the friendly struggle was going too far; "there is no necessity for that. Certainly not for any wrestling here to-day. There is no use in quarrelling about nothing."

"See, Mr. Canavan," said Charley. "The story is not to go off the bog of Mullawnmore to-day that I'm not the best man. I say I am."

"And I say *I* am," said his competitor.

"Very well," said Charley, "here's the way to end it. I'll lave it to Harry Canavan if it isn't. Over the way is the biggest jump ever jumped in this country. It was the jump Kevin Moore made, poor fellow! Let whoever jumps that to-day be the best man."

The prophet decided that this was fair, equitable, and peaceful; and thitherward they all, young and old, who had by this time become deeply engaged and interested in the discussion, proceeded.

The leap was, there was no mistaking it, a terrific one. None but those whose bodily powers were in their highest order could afford to essay it. Between two high banks, separated by some thirty feet, lay a deep pool of stagnant black water. The turf, having been carved straightly down, the banks were clearly defined and sharp as the edge of a knife. The leap should, therefore, be a clean one, and moreover, the leaper should go in some distance on the further bank, else the uncertain strength of the turf footing

might give way, and precipitate him backwards into the water.

A clear passage was made among the men assembled, for the leapers. Very few in the crowd believed that either would succeed, the leap looked such a tremendous and impossible one.

A toss up was called for between the two rivals, as to who should have the first jump. Charley's antagonist won it.

Buttoning his open shirt at his neck and over his white muscular breast, and on his wrists, to give the least possible chance of friction to the air, and tightening his belt around him, he stepped down to the side of the turf bank, noted out the place for his foot to stand on to jump from, and the apparent distance across, and then slowly walked back; whilst a running commentary from the older hands applauded the look of resolution and victory that was in his eye and erect head.

"More power to you, Phil! There never was a Maughan yet that hadn't the courage in him!"

"Ah! bud isn't he the fine sthraight young fellow!"

"You may say that. Sthraight as the ramrod of a Shilmalier's gun!"

"An' he no more than eighteen years of age. Look at his shoulders!"

"Aye, and the narrowness of his waist, and the breadth of his hips. He'll do it, I tell you."

"Sorra ever he'll do it. There's not a man in Ireland 'll do it."

"See if he don't. I tell you he will. Here he goes. Stand back, boys! Stand back! Give him a free run!"

The runner had started; slowly at first, but rapidly

hastening his pace, he passed with the speed of a flying arrow down the ranks to the mark on the turf bank, and, whilst a buzz of breathless expectancy rose through the two long lines of watchers, he lifted himself into the air.

During the second or two that elapsed before he reached the other side, not a whisper louder than this buzz arose. The leap, as we have said, was a tremendous one ; and as the strength and suppleness with which he projected himself faded—as the “ storage of force,” as latter-day philosophers phrase it, wore out—he swung partially round with his side to the bank.

His feet touched it, merely the rim, however—the sharp edge—which crumpled instantaneously under his feet, and precipitated him, like a falling rocket, into the water beneath.

A roar of applause burst from the people assembled as they saw him gain the other side, which had scarcely died out, as they saw that he failed to sustain his position, when an excited cry of “ Clear the way—room for Charley,” made the passage be cleared again.

At the top of the passage, when it re-formed, stood Charley. Dashing off with his hand rapidly the perspiration that gathered on his forehead, and swaying his body preparatorily a few times backwards and forwards, almost before the feet of his rival had disappeared below the embankment, he was flying on his way to the leap.

There was so much vigour, and power, and strength, and determination in the manner in which he ran to and faced the jump ; there was such an electric sense of victory in the rush of the air as he flew past, that no one in the instant or two the trial lay undetermined, doubted that he would cross it.

And, indeed, as with a rush of suppleness and strength combined, he rose up into the air, his knees resting almost against his breast, it seemed as if he were more flying than leaping.

And when he descended on the opposite bank—which he did a full foot inwards—and, steadying himself for a second, resumed his upright position, shook the perspiration from his forehead and blinding eyes, there rose such a cheer as had not arisen in Mullawnmore since the marching airs played by the advancing bards betokened a victory won for the O'Moores.

The unsuccessful rival was got out not much the worse for his ducking, and having shaken hands in a friendly way with the victor, the people crowded back to their work.

"That was a fine leap, Charley," said Mr. Canavan.

"So it was," replied Charley cheerfully.

"The longest, I think, ever was made in this country."

"Sorra doubt about it."

"I think it's as good as Kevin Moore's."

"Well, it's near as good anyhow—though I'm sure if Kevin were here to-day he'd bate it."

"Why?"

"Why whenever there was such a contention, and so many eyes looking on, Kevin was like myself, an' he'd burst his heart or be first."

"Ah! he was a plucky fellow."

"Sorra finer," said Charley gravely.

"He was; much too fine for Botany Bay."

"So he was. God protect him an' protect us all."

"Charley!" whispered Mr. Canavan easily.

"Yes," said Charley, turning quickly round.

"Walk easy ; stay behind the others. I want to speak to you."

"Very well," assented Charley, as he did so.

"Are you coming to the meeting to-night ?"

"I am. What d'ye think they're goin' to propose, or to do ?"

"That's a question it would be difficult to answer now."

"Why ?"

"Because no one knows. At least I don't."

"Sure there never was a meetin', barrin' a faction fight," said the youth, with a droll look, as he hitched up his trousers and tightened the belt around him, "but people knew what they wor meetin' for, or what they wor goin' to do."

"Not in this case, Charley—not in this case ; at least only in a general way," said Mr. Canavan. "We all know in a vague way what it will be necessary to propose and do."

"I wish you'd tell me then," said he, "for I don't."

"You don't ?"

"No."

"Nor didn't hear it to-day ?"

"No."

"Well you know it is advisable not to speak of it openly."

"So it is," assented Charley, rather dissatisfied. "But as I was one of those to propose the meetin', I might be tould what they have thought of doin'. But I haven't."

"Well, so much the better after all," said the school-master cheerfully, after a moment's consideration. "So much the better. I think it very sensible."

"Well, perhaps it is."

"To be sure it is, Charley. If there is to be a blow struck for the people at all, it must be struck in secret."

"No doubt."

"And something must be done, now or never."

"It's true for you."

"The prospect before the country is frightful—awful!"

"I hope they're not goin' to make it worse," said Charley drily.

"They could not make it worse—could they?" said the prophet, looking at him sharply.

"I think not."

"Then why did you say so?"

"Because I thought they might thry it."

"Try what?"

"To make it worse."

"How could they do that?" inquired the prophet, in his turn becoming highly dissatisfied with the turn of the conversation.

"By raisin' the devil. That's the only way they could make it worse," said Charley with a laugh that had as much anger as merriment in it. "That's the only way they could bring wan on this earth to do worse than that crew at Grangemore Castle."

"I think you are right there," said Canavan. "All, except Miss Hargrave; she is an exception."

"There is not one of them," said Charley, "that is not bad. There's not a good drop in their veins, nor couldn't be. Tigers or wolves would treat the people with more consideration."

"Well, there never was a barren field that you won't find a green patch in, nor a poisoned herb that you couldn't get good medicine out of. So I would except her. But the rest are bad. It's to discuss them the meeting is to be held to-night."

"I know that, for I was the one to propose id."

"Well, then, you'll be sure to be there?"

"Yes, I will," said the other promptly; "when will it be?"

"Well, the men will work till dusk, and ——"

"I'd like to see them go away earlier," said Charley with a little laugh. "They wouldn't do it next time, I'll go bail. Isn't it dreadful to think that people can be made such white slaves ov in their own land?"

"If it were only that, it wouldn't so much matter," said the schoolmaster with a deep sigh; "but it's awful to see the greater danger that constantly fronts the people—from the old woman unable to do more than sit in the arm-chair, to the little child learning to toddle. Beggary, starvation, the poor-house, death. It's awful to think of it. There must have been some awful crimes committed in this country and by the Irish race in forgotten days, or God would not visit the land and the people with such a punishment now."

"Do you know what I think, Harry?" said Charley familiarly, as he stopped for a second to pull a long thraneen wherewith to free his pipe, which he was now preparing to fill.

"No."

"Well, I'll tell you."

"Do, then," said the prophet, with some little curiosity to know what was going to be propounded.

"You won't feel angry if I tell you?"

"No,"

"Well, it is this. I don't believe God has any hand in it at all. Not a bit. It's the devil that's scourgin' the people for bein' so cowardly an' so foolish. You remember when we wor at school together?"

"Yes," said the schoolmaster, whilst a droll smile crossed his lips.

"You may well smile, Mr. Canavan; for it's little good it done me."

Mr. Canavan was about to intervene a polite dissent, but Charley stopped him.

"No, Mr. Canavan, I know what I'm saying. While you wor always readin' and larnin', I was always at somethin' else. While you were larnin' the Latin and Greek, I was larnin' to jump the hedge at the back of the school. And while you were readin' all night at the kitchen fire, long after they all went to bed, I was maybe—not maybe, but most likely or surely—playin' cards at the shop at the cross-roads, or gaffin' a salmon in the river, or shootin' a hare by moonlight at the back of the hill yonder. We couldn't all be good scholars, you know, Harry," he said affectionately, relaxing in his work of filling his pipe, and linking his bare, white muscular arm within the black cloth of the other's.

"No," said Harry, turning to look at him, and noticing, with a feeling of admiration that came back like a bodement of fate to his own heart, the fairness of skin, the brightness of eyes, the fullness of face, the look of abounding health that was in the muscular youth beside him, and then glancing at his own thin white hand; "but I think you have chosen the better part. However, what's done is done, and vain regrets would be idle and sinful. What were you going to say?"

"I was going to say this," said Charley impetuously, removing his linking arm to place it more emphatically on the other's shoulder, "God has no hand in this whatever. No; none. When we were at school we read about Pharaoh and

Moses ; didn't we ? I remember that much anyhow. Well, God punished the Egyptians for their evil, didn't He ?"

"Yes ; He did," assented the schoolmaster gently ; for his mind had got in on a train of saddening thoughts that preoccupied him, and he was giving for the moment but faint attention to what the other was saying.

"The leader—Pharaoh I mean—did badly—didn't he ?"

"Yes," assented Harry absently.

"He kept them slaves ; he harrassed them with work ; he drowned their little children—didn't he ? or kill them afore they were born—didn't he ?"

"He did."

"Well, we nor any of our race, if you went back to the very first that ever stepped on Irish land, never did that. We may fight wan another to see who's the best man, or the like, or for divarshin, whin there's nothing else to the fore ; but what Irishman ever murdered a woman, or what Irishman, above all, that wouldn't protect an' love a toddling little child ?"

"That's so," said the prophet. "Nowhere do this olden race show their kindly and chivalrous characteristics more than in the genial love and protection they show the little ones. Nothing shows their manful nature more."

"No. Well, Pharaoh an' his people did all that. They murdered the little ones before an' after they were born. They disobeyed God in every way, an' insulted Him. What did He do ?"

"He——"

"I don't want you to answer me," said Charley impetuously ; "I want you to listen to me. What did He do ? He sent them plagues. Plagues of one kind or another. Wan

of beasts to eat up the crops, wan of darkness, one of some-
thin' else, an' wan, the worst, that killed the eldest child.
Well! what plagues are sent to us for doin' nothin' half so
bad as they did? Every wan of these plagues rolled into a
lump an' made into wan, an' that wan is—the landlords.
They eat up the crops, an' they kill the first born an'
youngest born, an' the whole family; an' they make the
people mix the water wid the blood of their tears; an' they
make them make bricks athout sthraw—at laiste," said
Charley, laughing, "they make 'em make turf for nothin' in
the hate of the day, which is much the same thing."

"That's not a bad illustration, Charley," said the prophet,
as he laughed, partly against his will—for he was in no great
mood for laughing—at the fervour of the other's remarks.

"No," said Charley, resuming his seriousness, "because
it's true—perfectly true—with this addition, that with Moses
and his people the plagues lasted only for a short time—
with us they're likely to be present always—to last for ever."

"The eleventh plague, Charley, is, I suppose, their per-
manency."

"That's it," said Charley. "That's just it. That's what
makes me think God has no hand in these things. He
wouldn't punish people so; it's the devil that done it, an' is
doin' it, bekaise the people have all grown cowardly."

"There may be something in what you say, Charley; but,
at any rate, remember to come to the meeting-room yonder
to-night. Somebody may suggest something to save the
people. Necessity is the mother of invention, you know."

"Begor an'," says Charley, "she's so well kept up an'
attended to in Westmeath she might be the mother of a
great many other childher by this time."

This sally provoked another laugh

"Will there be many there?"

"Yes; a good many."

"Will they go home first?"

"No."

"Will they go there after work?"

"Yes."

"Just as they are?"

"Yes. Just as they are."

"In their bare feet?"

"Yes; it might look remarkable to see them coming this way afterwards if they went home. There is nothing remarkable in seeing the men scatter among the tombstones, after their work, to say a prayer at their friends' graves. They always do that, don't they?"

"They do."

"Don't you think it's the best course?"

"I think any coorse, Harry, is the best coorse," said Charley, turning up his sleeves, which had fallen down, to his elbows, over the powerful white flexors of his arm, and turning round to face the other, standing as he did so stationary, "that's acted on at wanst. It isn't waitin' for to-day or to-morrow, or Friday fortnight, or seven weeks. It isn't waitin' till another townland is turned out, an' a dozen other crathurs an' their families are sint on the high road."

"There I am with you," said the prophet earnestly. "It must be at once. Prompt steps of some kind, whatever they may be, must be taken."

"Because, if not, I'm determined to go away. I won't stop another Christmas in this land of Ireland, dearly as I

love it. I can't abear to see the people around me in such constant dread and distress. Wan's life was made for somethin' better nor that."

"That is true, too, Charley," said the prophet, with a deep sigh. "Youth was made for something better and brighter than everlasting fret and trouble. That beautiful scenery around was not intended to rear people for that. Nor the bright blue sky above to rain its gentle rain nor pour its bright warmth over them."

"Very well," said Charley, whose vigorous frame had not much sympathy with the poetry of sentiment. "I'll be there."

"Yes ; and bring any others you can trust and that are of your own way of thinking with you."

"Yes."

"Your late opponent, for instance."

"An' a good fellow, too. Sound as steel," said Charley approvingly, no way influenced by their late heated rivalry.

"About dusk, you say ?"

"Yes ; after work. Some short time after."

"The moon will be risen then."

"No matter. Good-bye."

"Good-bye."

"I say, Harry," said Charley, turning round when they had parted some short distance, walking back to his friend, "Do you know what you might call the meetin' ?"

"Call it ! What do you mean ?"

"I mean, if you wanted to give it a name That's wan for you."

He glanced, as did the other, at the crowding people that, stepping over the black turf banks, in their naked feet, began to resume their work.

"What is it?" said the prophet, with a touch of drollery in his eyes as he asked the question.

"You see all these men?"

"Yes."

"See all their white feet?"

"Yes."

"Very white they look against the black turf—don't they?"

"Yes; they do."

"They are all to go in their bare feet, aren't they?"

"Yes."

"Then call it the barefooted meeting."

"Or better again," resumed the speaker, as he turned to go, with a look of fun laughing out of his eyes, "call 'em the Whitefeet."

"The Whitefeet!" echoed the prophet, answering his bright smile with another. "The Whitefeet! Not a bad name either. The Whitefeet then be it."

They turned to part.

"Oh, by the way, Harry, I forgot to tell you," said Charley, once more retracing his steps. "I forgot to tell you. Do you know what?"

"What?"

"Somebody's come back."

"Come back?"

"Yes, come back."

"Who?"

"Guess."

"Guess? How could I guess?"

"Well, you must guess! It's worth guessing to know."

"I can't guess. Who is it?"

"Try and guess."

"Joe Corrigan—Hugh Kinsella."

"No; guess again. It's long till they'll touch Irish soil. Guess again?"

"Kevin Moore."

"No, poor fellow. Not him. It's long till he'll see Irish soil aither."

"Well, I don't know. I give it up."

"I'm sorry you do, bekaise it's an ould friend of yours."

"An ould friend of mine?"

"Well a young friend if you like it better."

"Oh! Come, Charley. Tell me. Don't keep me in suspense."

"Well it's—it's—it's"—said Charley, prolonging the delay maliciously, "it's Norah Moore!"

"Norah Moore!" said the prophet standing suddenly, as if stricken into stone. The pallor of his countenance gave place to a warm glow, as the blood mounted into his face and temples almost instantaneously.

"I knew it would surprise you," said Charley. "I knew it would."

"Are you sure of this?"

"Quite sure."

"Did you see her?"

"No; but I know them that did."

"When?"

"Yesterday."

"Where?"

"You'll know that very soon."

"In this county?"

"I can't tell you for the present. You'll soon know"
And with this they parted.

CHAPTER XI.

THE RECOVERY.

WHEN Rupert Clarendon woke the next morning Colonel Montfort was again by his bedside. He had ridden out at early dawn from the barracks in Athlone to see his young friend. And with him was the doctor.

"Well, Rupert," said he pleasantly. "Do you know me?"

"Colonel Montfort!" said Rupert faintly, but with an answering smile.

"Yes ; oh, I see you are all right. Do you feel pain anywhere?"

"My head and my arm," said Rupert, as he felt a dullness in the one and an unaccountable twinge in the other.

"Oh, you will be all right soon," said the colonel cheerfully. "Don't you think so, doctor?"

"Oh, yes ; he'll make rapid recovery now," said the doctor, taking the disengaged hand in his. "His pulse is quite even and steady."

"You have had a marvellous escape," said the colonel. "You have signalised your entrance into this land of Ireland very remarkably. Thoroughly Irish it was, too, doctor—wasn't it?"

"Quite," said the doctor.

"No Galway-blazer could do it better?"

"No. Not one."

"I should like to see the fox-hunter that would try and take that leap."

"Yes ; I should think so," assented the doctor.

"Why, Rupert, you have out-heroded Herod ; you've beaten the Irishmen on their own ground. When Englishmen were for generations domiciled in Ireland, they became, for revolution, rebellion, and other like peaceful qualities, more Irish than the Irish themselves. 'Ipsis Hibernis Hiberniores,' the phrase ran, I think. But you have beaten them, excelled them immeasurably—the very first day, too. Hasn't he, doctor ?"

"Yes, he has," said the doctor.

"Yes, at steeplechasing. Think of that, Rupert ! The only other game which Irishmen rank next in worth and amusement to insurrection or rebellion. Isn't it so, doctor ?"

"Except love-making," said the doctor drily.

"Ah, yes ! I beg your pardon. I forgot that. Love-making ! Yes. But you must not try to rival them in that, Rupert. That's even worse than either of the others. Isn't it, doctor ?"

"Much worse," said the doctor gravely. "The others are quite innocent and harmless compared with that."

"Yes ; that's the medical opinion, Rupert ; besides, it's against the regulations. There used to be an old statute forbidding intermarriage with the mere Irish. The men who drew that up knew their business. I'm not sure but it's on the statute-book still ; but if it isn't, it ought to be. Don't you think so ?"

"Certainly," said the doctor ; "it was a most beneficent regulation."

"Of course it was. Much better for a man to get in among a den of lions than amongst those Irish girls."

"Where am I ?" suddenly asked Rupert.

He had been lying half-dozing, half-amused, as this pleasant badinage proceeded. The mention of the words "Irish girls" suddenly brought to his mind some indistinct vision of a fair face having been before his eyes during his illness.

"I'll tell you presently," said the colonel.

"Am I long here?"

"Some three or four weeks, Rupert. But you won't be much longer here, for the doctor says you will improve rapidly."

The doctor, seeing that the colonel was anxious for a conversation with the patient privately, withdrew.

"As to where you are, Rupert?" said the colonel, taking a seat beside him, and whispering lowly.

"Yes," said Rupert.

"Well, I think it right for various reasons to tell you where you are."

"I shall be obliged."

"Well, do you remember—probably you do, or you have heard of it—the shooting of your uncle, Colonel Clarendon, in a duel?"

"Yes; I have."

"There were some unpleasant circumstances in connection with it, apart from the duel itself, which perhaps you have not heard. But it would be unnecessary and inadvisable to go back on them now. Well, by some curious coincidence, or chain of coincidences, you are now in the very house of his opponent."

"Sir Hardinge's?"

"Yes; Sir Hardinge's. How did you come to know his name?"

"I heard it."

"Here?"

"No; from the driver of the coach."

"Ah, that unlucky driver."

"How is he?"

"Getting much better. There are some fellows, mostly black, gnarled characters like him, Rupert, that you might fling off the dome of St. Paul's, and you could not kill them. Your driver is one of them."

"I am glad to hear that."

"Well that is so. He was carried to a farmer's house some distance off—Maury Keeffe, I think, is the name of the owner—where there is an exceedingly pretty girl too, by-the-bye."

"Yes, I know," said Rupert, who at once remembered the meeting by the stream.

"The devil you do!" said the colonel testily. "You have been picking up knowledge very fast."

Rupert smiled, as the colonel assumed an angry countenance at finding himself forestalled in so much of his information.

"You'll soon be of some invaluable assistance to us from the amount of your local information," said the colonel.

"Is Maury Keeffe one of the enemy?" asked Rupert with an indolent smile.

"They're all enemies for the matter of that," said the colonel. "From the old woman that sits crooning and knitting in the sun to the baby asleep in the cradle, they're all enemies."

"All enemies?"

"All; the Irish enemy. In theory, that is."

"Formidable foes!"

"So they are, Rupert, so they are. You have no idea of it."

"I am afraid not," said Rupert. "How does it come to pass?"

"Well it would require a little dissertation on local society to enable you to understand it. Are you strong enough to bear it?"

"Go on," said Rupert. "I feel very pleasant here. It relieves me to hear you speak."

"That's right. Let me lift your head a little. There now! That's better. Well, you must know that society, so complex generally everywhere else, is simplified here in the greatest degree."

"Indeed!"

"Yes."

"Explain."

"Well, you see, in England, as elsewhere, you have various degrees of rank. You have the great nobleman, whose family rules the country; you have the great county families; you have the hunting squire, the farming squire, and the millionaire manufacturer. Also you have the great East India merchant and the wealthy planter, who have purchased estates in the county. And so on down through the various degrees to Hodge himself, and all tied and banded together in the various kinds of social relationship and citizenship. Here we get rid of that altogether. Here we simplify matters immensely."

"That must be an advantage."

"Well, perhaps it is," said the colonel drily, "though the advantages are not very apparent at first. They have not become apparent to me yet."

"Haven't they?"

"No."

"I should think they ought."

"They have not. We simplify matters in this way. We divide our citizens here into two classes—the landlords and the tenants. They are the only social distinctions of rank tolerated in this primitive land."

"Well, they are easily recognised. That's an advantage."

"Easily recognised! I should think so. They are as marked in their difference as two tribes of red Indians. All the more because they are sworn enemies."

"Enemies!"

"Yes. I should have said born enemies. From the time a baby in the cradle notices the light, it begins to curse the landlord; and *vice versa*, before a landlord's son is half a dozen hours old, I verily believe he is thinking of the best plan to raise the rents."

"That's a lively picture."

"And true, every word of it. True as the Gospel. That old man dying in his cabin, gasping, waiting for the priest to come to him, the chances are that his greatest regret at leaving the world is that he can't fire another hayrick of the landlord's, or have another shot at him. And the landlord, when he's dying, his last words to his heir, are—'Bill this or Tom that ought to pay more rent. The townland of Glen-this or Bally-that could bear another five hundred. If they don't pay it, turn 'em out, clear 'em out!'"

"Rather a curious state of affairs."

"Best of it all is that both parties look on it as a perfectly normal state of things, and as if it were quite impossible, and indeed unnatural, that it should be otherwise. It's a

nice question of give and take. I am a farmer say in Ballyedmond. Well, I am coming home from the fair some night, with three or four or half a dozen glasses of whiskey in me. I happen to be passing near my landlord's ; and my heart and brain being warm and pleasant, I remember some quarrel we've had. I step across the hedge, through the fields, and fire a haystack or two to light myself home. Landlord immediately suspects another fellow, maybe a cousin of mine, in Ballyporeen ; and without further ado raises the rents in Ballyporeen all round. That makes the citizens in Ballyporeen still more pleasantly disposed towards him. And there you are !"

"A nice state of things !" said Rupert, with a droll smile at the free-and-easy explanation of the other. "And you ?"

"Well, we do our best."

"To keep peace between them ?"

"Certainly not," said the colonel, with assumed indignation.

"And what then ? You puzzle me !"

"You have not read political economy deeply enough yet, Rupert, to understand it. We do nothing but studying it here. We read nothing else."

"I don't see what that has to do with it."

"Don't you see that there is but one landlord, whilst there may be five thousand tenants. That's not fair play. So our paternal Government, desiring to equalize matters, sends us across."

"What ! To help the landlords ?"

"That's just it, Rupert."

"And do you like the work ?"

"Why, at first it didn't seem very comforting to one's

notion of chivalry or honour ; but one gets used to it, Rupert—one gets used to it. Much as the eels get used to the skinning, and like it.”

“ I understand,” said Rupert, falling into the humour of the droll gravity of the other.

“ Therefore, it is, Rupert, that we come to regard them as our enemies. That young girl, singing a song as she carries the milk pail over the daisy field, stops her song when she sees us ride past. You might as well expect the lark to sing in the presence of the hawk. The very baby in his mother’s or sister’s arms glares at us, as if he were wishing he had a double-barrelled blunderbuss for just about five minutes.”

“ It must be a very pleasant life.”

“ You can have no idea of it. No ennui whatever. Order comes to send a troop to Sir Somebody’s townland, to attend distraint, or sale, or eviction, Thursday morning. Thursday morning comes ; maybe it’s a winter’s morning, with the snow half a foot on the ground, and the men are preparing to leave the barrack yard. Not being political economists, the men don’t like the work. They have not reached the gate, when a messenger comes riding in, with a face brightened up with exercise and delight. He is Sir Somebody’s trusted steward, or bailiff, or something or other, and he rides in to say that we need not go. Sir Somebody was shot last night through the lungs, whilst he was admiring the moon or the snow from his drawing-room window ; or just as he was getting off his horse at the hall-door step a round bullet fired from the clump of trees, a few yards in advance, breaks his right leg into smithereens. Messenger relates this with as much pleasantness and happiness as if he were telling how he fell in for a fortune. He seems actually

proud of the honour that has befallen his master. It seems a new title, answering to a peerage, or a C.B. in England, has been conferred upon him."

"Don't you think it rather singular duty to be on?"

"It did at first seem so ; but, as I said before, we have got used to it. Besides these, little incidents turn up frequently enough to vary it very agreeably. Now, there was Kevin Moore for instance——"

"Kevin Moore? Oh, yes. It was he that had the handsome sister," said Rupert.

"What was her name, pray?" asked the colonel testily.

"Norah Moore?"

"Norah Moore! May I ask you a question, Rupert?"

"Yes, certainly," said Rupert.

"How long were you in Westmeath?"

"Only while I was driving from the boundary to that confounded quarry."

"Well, I must say you have picked up a most extensive knowledge, in a mighty short time, of its history and antiquities."

"Antiquities!" said Rupert remonstratingly.

"Well, Natural History then."

"Hardly that either," said Rupert laughing. "But that brings me round to what I was asking you. Where am I now, and whose house am I in?"

"Oh, yes. I had forgotten that, too. To tell you which was, indeed—besides seeing how you were doing—my chief business here this morning. You are in Sir Hardinge's house. That makes the awkwardness of the thing," said the colonel with some degree of annoyance in his manner. "It was unpleasant enough that your uncle should lose his life

by his hand ; but there were other circumstances attending the duel that make it exceedingly uncomfortable that you should be his guest even by accident."

"What shall I do?"

"I fancy there is nothing," said the colonel with great seriousness of manner, "for you to do but wait here until you are better. Meantime, let no word be dropped to indicate that you know of the old quarrel."

"Unless they mention it."

"Which they will be certain not to do ; if by chance they should, change the topic as delicately as you can. There are reasons for it, and, at any rate, they have been very kind and very attentive to you."

"How many are there in the family?"

"Four ; Sir Hardinge, his lady, his son and daughter. But I need not describe them. You will know them all shortly. I was anxious to be the first to explain your position to you, lest some awkward contretemps should occur."

"I am very much obliged."

"Don't mention it. I think we've talked enough for one morning, and as I have work to do this morning, I shall ride back to barracks without delay."

And after some further conversation they parted, and Rupert was left to his own reflection.

"It's a very awkward business I should have come here of all places in the world," he thought to himself. "What a curious coincidence !"

But as his position was none of his seeking, and beyond his prevention or remedy, Rupert had good sense enough to accept circumstances as they were, and to make the best of them.

CHAPTER XII.

ORCHARD COTTAGE.

RUPERT grew rapidly well, and in a few days was able to move about. There was a great deal of kindness and attention shown to him by Sir Hardinge and his family; and, insensibly, in the intimacy that grew up, he had learned in a great degree to forget the old sore that existed.

Whether he talked on the balcony with Sir Hardinge and his lady, accompanied Marmaduke on a sporting excursion, through the plantation at the back of the house, or walked with Miss Lucy through the flower-beds and the rose trees, and the blooming peaches that lay to the left, there was nothing but the greatest courtesy and kindness shown him. Nothing in the slightest degree manifested itself in their words or actions to indicate that any previous unpleasantness had ever existed.

Marmaduke he found a very agreeable fellow. His knowledge of the world, his intimate acquaintance with London life and society, and with a good many of the actors therein whom Rupert also knew, made his conversation very cheering and pleasant. A quiet, harmless young fellow he seemed to be, who, when he was in good health, must have been an engaging companion, but whose health now was too debilitated to allow him very much activity.

Miss Hardinge he found to be a very prepossessing girl, with very little of her mother's haughtiness and a good deal of her father's frankness of manner.

But running through the conversation of all he found, to his great surprise, a marked dislike and contempt for the people who tenanted the estates. It was not so marked in the younger people as in the elder, but it was there manifestly, and occurred at times in conversation so naturally as to seem to be part and parcel of their education.

Rupert had never seen the like manifested in England. He had always been accustomed to hear his father talk of his tenantry with kindness and respect, and it impressed him somehow painfully to hear the depreciating references that were constantly being made to the people now.

As with other things, however, familiarity dulled his sense of these unpleasant reflections, and after a short time they began to lose their freshness, and he began to feel accustomed to them. Even Miss Hargrave's slighting references began by degrees not to seem strange to him ; and by the time he had been a few days among them he had begun insensibly himself to imbibe the same prejudices.

His days passed very agreeably. It was so pleasant in the early morning to walk over the neatly-shaven lawn with Marmaduke or Sir Hardinge ; or through the heath on the hillside, where the rustle of the grouse moving uneasily through the long grass, or calling to one another plaintively, alone disturbed the quiet beauty of the scene. It was so delightful to walk with Miss Hargrave through the cool groves of trees that sloped down to the lake, through whose silent corridors the sunlight fell in broken patches on the mossy soft grass under his feet. There was so much that was kindly and courteous, there was so much sympathy and solicitude shown for him, that he soon learned to forget that there had ever been any unpleasantness between their

families, or that the blinds had ever been drawn down on the mourning-house in Devonshire.

He was agreeably attracted by the place, and he was, unknown to himself, beginning to be attached to Miss Hargrave. The quiet gentleness of her manner harmonised so pleasantly with the woodland scenery, and seemed associating itself with the delightful happiness of returning health and strength, that he grew to like her society inexpressibly.

It was delightful, too, to lean back in the boat on the lake, the sunlight sparkling from its quiet waters—save where the shadows of the tall trees on its banks cast a picturesque shadow—and rest his injured arm, while the young girl, her face glowing with exercise and her eyes bright with pleasure, slowly rowed him along.

There was a dreamy sense of pleasure, of rest, in these evening rows on the still waters of the lake. There was a pleasant feeling of sensuous repose surrounding him, wholly undisturbed by any outward troubles or annoyances ; his mind felt bathed in an atmosphere warm as the bright air around him, and quiet as the solemn stillness of the shadowed groves.

Colonel Montfort had been engaged ever since he had seen him. He had sent him word to that effect, with his regrets that he was unable to call over to visit him, and his hopes that he was getting better.

Some disturbance had been occurring in the Northern portion of the county ; some graziers who had recently taken large tracts of land that had been "cleared" for them had had their cattle slaughtered in the night-time. Some of the former tenants, poor creatures, had been seen hanging about the site of their former homes, and were most naturally

suspected of the business. Not, indeed, that there was much otherwise to attract them there; for the thatch of their cottages had long since been rotten as manure in the dyke and on the headland, and there was neither wall nor window nor hearthstone to indicate where their homes had been. The light should never glimmer again in the cottage windows, nor the bright fire burn on the hearth, nor sleeping baby nestle in its mother's lap, as the pleasant chat went round by the fireside of winter nights. Ages of tribulation and sorrow and submission had driven a good deal of the manhood out of the men-kind, and so they left their homes with far less disposition to resistance than ever hunted Indian did before the advancing pale-face.

So submissive indeed were they, and so humbly disposed to see their homes torn down and their families turned on the roadside without raising a hand, that the colonel himself inclined to strongly dislike the clearances, could not help saying often to himself, as he rode along with his men, that they were hardly worth giving shelter to, who could so helplessly look on, and, with tears in their eyes, see their wives and little ones turned out to starve without raising a hand to save them!

But against that again, however, could be placed the flattering tribute of the Judge of Assize on the peaceful character of the people. There had not been for years outrage of any kind in the county. It was the most peaceful county in Ireland. Nowhere was the law so revered and respected. It was a model county. And even the Prime Minister of the day had borne testimony to its good character and the law-abiding disposition of its people, in a remarkable speech in the House of Commons.

What Colonel Montfort thought, however, of this excessive law-abiding disposition of the people might be inferred from an extract from one of his letters to Rupert, in apology for not calling upon him :—

"I declare I don't know, Rupert, what destiny is before these unlucky natives. They are turned out more remorselessly from their holdings than ever Pizarro and his followers turned the naked Indians from their hunting grounds, with this exception, that the Indians fought for their grounds. These people won't or don't know how to fight.

"They yield up their farms and see their houses torn down before their faces with the weakness and tears of old women.

"We are here protecting a townland, now held by one Sandy M'Nab, where over a dozen families some two years ago dwelt. Sandy's cattle were found slaughtered a few nights since, and it is supposed that some of the former tenants did it in revenge. I don't believe a word of it, Rupert ; but there is no use in sayin' so.

"Why? Why don't I believe it? Firstly, because I don't think these unfortunate wretches had pluck enough to do even that. Secondly, the cattle were all skilfully slaughtered and I believe have been prepared for the market since.

"In addition, Sandy has got a threatening letter. I have heard, as a matter of fact, from the landlord, and told as rather a good joke, too, that Sandy's son wrote the letter.

"What is the object of all this, you will say? I don't know, except to still more punish these unfortunate wretches that are rambling, ragged and starving, around the country, and to have them transported out of it."

"My own impression is that, diabolical as the intention is, Rupert, it would be the luckiest thing that could happen these hapless, spiritless creatures. Better again if they could be all taken out in a ship and scuttled in mid-ocean. They would be put then out of pain and suffering at once."

"I am growing heartily tired of this wretched country, and the deceit and trickery I see around me. It seems to me like—but I won't say what it is like."

"I shall sell out if I cannot exchange on foreign service."

"If you are writing home, Rupert, don't mention your accident or your present location. Better, perhaps, not write at all for some time."

"I shall ride on to see you the moment I get back."

* * * * *

Rupert had received the letter, of which this is an extract, one morning after breakfast, and read it on the verandah of the house.

It awoke some curious reflections within him, and recalled to his mind a good deal of what Joe, the coachman, had been telling him the day of their drive.

As he laid the letter on his knees, and threw his eye on the fertile plains that lay before him, and let them rest on the Shannon, that, in the morning's sun, lay like a bright ribbon of gold in the distance, he could not help saying to himself—

"Well, this beautiful land deserves a better and braver race who would defend its possessions. It's a beautiful land. Beautiful!"

"I'm nearly glad the colonel is away," was Rupert's next reflection. "I should have to go with him to barracks if he were at home. I certainly hope he will remain away for some time."

Probably these reflections were heightened as he saw Miss Hargrave in the gardens beneath him, busily engaged in taking off the withered leaves from the flowers. Her bright face looked up to him where he sat with a pleasant smile of recognition, and—as Rupert interpreted it—of invitation. Accepting the latter, he returned the smile, and folding up the letter, and placing it in his pocket, left the verandah, and descended the steps of the garden.

The bright glory and warmth of the morning sun falling on the freshly opened petals of the flowers evoked their richest perfumes, and the air was laden with the fresh scents—sensuous and voluptuous in their very exquisiteness—as he entered it.

A sense of delicious feeling—partly begotten of the returning health that sent his blood in a rushing current through his veins, of the bright freshness of the summer morning, and the dreamy languor of the perfumed atmosphere—pervaded him.

He was never before so disposed to feel pleased with everything. His heart opened itself to the bright influences around him, and as he looked on the handsome face, bright with exercise, and wreathed with smiles of welcome, he was disposed to thank Providence for the accident that had thrown his lines into such pleasant places; and Colonel Montfort for having so conveniently kept away.

"You are early at work, Miss Hargrave," said Rupert, as he took his seat beside the rosebud she was trimming.

"No; rather late this morning," said the young lady. "I should have all this work done an hour ago."

"I am glad that you are so late, Miss Hargrave," said Rupert pleasantly, "on this occasion."

"Why?"

"Because it gives me the pleasure of aiding you."

"Are you skilled in gardening?"

"Well, I cannot say that it occupies very much of my attention; but I'm a quick learner. I shall learn very soon."

"A diligent learner should be up earlier, Mr. Clarendon. No one ever learned his business yet by commencing his work at ten o'clock."

"Well, that was not my fault, Miss Hargrave," said Rupert gaily.

"Whose else?" said the young lady as she pressed the tuft of faded leaves into her tiny left hand with the fingers of her right.

"I don't know. Not mine certainly."

"Why not?"

"Because I did not know that I was expected to learn."

"Nor are you."

"I thought you had promised to take me under your tuition a moment since."

"No; you suggested it."

"And you accepted the suggestion, I thought."

"No. I rather declined it, and gave my reasons for it."

"These reasons are untenable, Miss Hargrave. I shall show myself a most industrious apprentice."

"I fear we should want another Hogarth to draw our idle apprentice. How long would you bind yourself?"

"For life—if you like," said Rupert, with a meaning glance.

"Oh, no," said the young lady with a merry laugh, "you should have your business learned long before that."

"How long does it take to learn?"

"It all depends upon intelligence and industry and observation."

"I was always particularly good at observation," said Rupert; "very. I could spend the whole day observing sometimes—and do nothing else."

"That is carrying observation a little further than is necessary or useful, I think," said the young lady, laughing. "It should be combined with the other qualities."

"Oh, yes! I know. I know how to blend them very well. I was only showing you how largely I possess the faculty of observation."

"A little in excess, perhaps," said Miss Hargrave, smiling, as she again addressed herself to her work. "Industry, for instance, wants to be largely mixed with it."

"So I see," said Rupert; "but your example, my dear Miss Hargrave, will be sufficient for that. You know 'imitation is the sincerest form of flattery.' No, deuce take it! that's not the proverb I wanted."

"Never mind," said Miss Hargrave, pleasantly, "it will do excellently. It meets the circumstance of the case abundantly. But I am afraid until your arm gets better, industry is out of the question."

"Well, you can take me on probation—on a sort of probationary understanding."

"Yes, perhaps I could. But the duties would be heavy."

"Heavy! I am sorry to hear that," said Rupert, with a mock feeling of regret.

"I fear you don't like work."

"I love work exceedingly, Miss Hargrave; but I don't run much with heavy work. Would the duties be very heavy?"

"Well, yes, I think they would. You should be up at six o'clock in the morning."

"Yes, that's not too bad. That's military hour you know."

"You should carry water from the lake. The fountains have gone out of order these past few days."

"Ah, that indeed!" said Rupert, as he glanced at his arm in a sling. "I fear that would be out of the question. That unfortunate coach!"

"Say that unfortunate shot," said Miss Hargrave with great sympathy. "Marmaduke was awfully sorry when he saw the result of it. He had been lying behind the mound, waiting for a shot, and had failed to see the coach when he fired. What a sad shot it was in consequences."

"Well, not exactly because of the shot, Miss Hargrave, but rather because the driver had let the reins fall on the horse's back, and could not again pick them up. But it certainly was an awful race down the hill."

"You had a marvellous escape."

"Yes; and so had poor Joe. I wonder how he is to-day."

"Oh, that puts me in mind to tell you, what I would otherwise have forgotten," said Miss Hargrave, turning quietly around to him, all traces of the previous banter having disappeared from her face, "that Joe sent you word last night that he would be glad to see you—that he is anxious to see you."

"Where does he live?"

"You cannot see the place from here, but you see yonder mound with the grove of trees at its summit?"

"Yes; I see that."

"At the base of that hill, on the other side. That little

stream that runs yonder winds round the hill and leads to the house, and will bring you to it. A path runs by its side."

"What's the name of the house, if I should learn to forget it?"

"They call the place Orchard House. They brought him there after the accident."

"Orchard House," repeated Rupert. "That name somehow seems familiar to me."

"I fancy not. You could scarcely have heard it before."



CHAPTER XIII.

ON THE CONVICT SHIP.

KEVIN grew in strength rapidly. The fever had burnt out whatever else there was impure in his system, and when it left his vigour speedily recovered.

The doctor, who called repeatedly, was very kind; and, although he could not violate any of the rules of the hospital by giving Phelim a second bed in the cell, he could, and did, see that they were provided with all the food and nourishment that was necessary.

A hearty young fellow was the doctor; and, although with no special regard for convicts in general, or Irishmen in particular, and very careless and indifferent in the main to everybody, he became very much interested in these two convicts, attracted thereto in all probability by the care and kindness, unprecedented in his experience, shown by the

one to the other in such a highly unselfish and marked degree. The convicts, on their part, were always very glad to see him, and the sight of his pleasant, cheery face entering through the open iron door, made it seem to them as if half of the punishment of their sentence was removed, and that it was a bond or connecting link between them and the outer world hidden away from them.

It came to pass that, one morning, just as they were sitting dressed and ready for the warder to come and allow them to walk in the hospital yard for some time, the door opened, and their eyes were much gratified to see enter, along with the warder, the doctor.

Their feelings of pleasure were, however, much abated when the doctor, having to the intense surprise and disgust of the warder, shook hands with them, and bade them a hearty good morning, announced the purport of his visit.

"Well, No. 25, do you feel yourself quite strong and recovered now?"

Kevin said he did, perfectly.

"And you, No. 37—do you feel quite strong, too?"

Yes; 37 felt quite strong, too. Always did feel stronger and better for seeing the questioner. There was never anyone so good or so kind as he was. Never. They never could forget it to him.

All this in a quiet, shy way, No. 37. So very shy and retiring that Kevin could not help smiling an approving and good-humoured smile thereat.

"Because," said the doctor, who had heard Phelim's thanks with the greatest good humour and signs of pleasure, "I am so glad that you are, for you will leave to-day."

"Leave to-day!" cried both men at once.

"Yes ; the vessel will sail in a few days, and you must go on board to-day."

"We are going to Botany Bay, then ?" said the younger convict, with that same despairing and lonely feeling shadowing him that so appalled him that foggy forenoon two months previously, when he stood handcuffed by the wall in the shot-yard. And in a second of time there rose before him again the pleasant fields of Westmeath, the silver surface of the Shannon, the bright uplands and winding streams of that fertile county. And perhaps other and dearer ties arose on his memory.

"Yes ; you will sail in a few days, and you go aboard to-day. Don't let yourselves be disheartened. The voyage is not at all a disagreeable one, and there is much more liberty allowed when you get out some distance than there is in a land prison."

"When do we start ?" asked Clareman, whose ten years of suffering had left him quick to obey directions without once dreaming of questioning them.

"Now," said the warder gruffly.

"Now," said Kevin, repeating the words after him with great surprise.

"Yes, now. At once. And be quick about it. Do you want to keep me here waiting on you all the morning ?"

Kevin looked at his companion, who was standing up perfectly erect, with his hands by his side, and palms turned out, as he had often stood by the hour at a time in the prison square, during his ten years. Seeing him so ready and prepared to start, Kevin got partly ashamed of his own complaining disposition, and made an effort to shake off the dreadful feelings of forlornness and despondency that weighed on him.

"One thing is in your favour, at any rate," said the doctor pleasantly. "You have not got much traps to take with you or to encumber you."

"Except these," said the warder, pointing to the fetters, which, having been taken off during their time in the cell, were now again to be resumed.

Whilst he spoke the prison smith, who was waiting outside, entered, and in a few seconds the two men were again accoutred, as we have already seen them, on their march.

"Well, good-bye," said the doctor, shaking hands with them. "I shall not see you again. I should not under any chance have seen you again, for I am going away on leave to Paris to-night."

The two men returned his grasp very warmly, and expressed their sense of his kindness.

"Our thanks is all we can give you," said Kevin. "There is very little chance of our ever returning your kindness in any other way."

"Very little, indeed," said the doctor assentingly, "but your thanks is quite enough. If there were no kindnesses shown in this world, except when it was expected they would be returned, it would be a very poor world. You are sailing in a good time, and are likely to have fine weather. I start for Paris myself to-night. Good-bye! Pleasant journey, so far as pleasantness can be," and he turned on his heel and left the cell.

The eyes of the two men followed him with looks of thanks and sorrow; but their attention was speedily directed to the journey before them by the smith, who was fastening on their chains, and by the harsh order of the warder.

"Attention! heads up! hold your wrists out!" and in a

few minutes they were, wrist and ankle, tethered as before and, handcuffed as before, marched out to the prison yard. There they found a great many new comers, who had arrived the previous night, all ready for shipment. These had evidently had a long march, for the men looked frightfully exhausted, and some of them, as they tried to get up, fell again on the hard stones of the prison yard. As Kevin looked at them he could not help remembering that agonised walk he had himself some time before, when the lights of the city first fell on his blurred and fevered eyes.

Their walk this time, however, was not far. They had only to march to the quays, whence the convict tender took them on board the ship that lay anchored in the outer harbour.

As the sun of the May morning fell upon the sparkling waters, dancing and glistening in every silvery wave that rolled inwards, Clareman chucked at the handcuff that fastened them, and said :—

"That reminds me of Clare."

"Does it?" said Kevin.

"It does," said the other. "Thousands of times I've looked on the sea from my door just when it was shining like that."

"It must have been very pleasant," said Kevin, as he looked on the wide waters with a new feeling of pleasure and awe arising in his mind. Being an inland dweller, he had never seen the sea before; and the wonderful expanse of water filled him with surprise. It seemed to him as if he had never before thoroughly realised the might and the power of God. Most people who have grown to years of manhood without having seen the ocean, feel the same powerful sense of impressment at the first sight of it.

"It was very pleasant. It was heaven! It was as if the face of God looked up to us from the sea every morning just as He looked down to us from the starry sky at night. How little I thought then that the day would come when I'd see it, chained, and fettered, and handcuffed. And very glad to see it even at that."

"I never saw the sea before. I never thought the power of God was so great," said Kevin, only half attending to his companion's remarks. "I feel my spirits grow brighter as I look at it. It can't be possible, Phelim," said he, sinking his voice, "that God, who is mighty and powerful enough to keep that immense body of water ebbing, and flowing, and moving for ever, will let a few men wreak such wrong as you and I have suffered. I don't think He will. I'm sure—I feel confident—He won't."

"I don't know" said Phelim despondingly, as the surface of the sunlit sea called to him old and affecting memories. "I know that Mary and her baby—God bless 'em?—died one snowy night, wid the hunger and the cowl'd, in a hut ov branches, with melted snow-water around 'em. For nothin'. They never did harm to any one. I know that I put in ten years in prison, half ov it in the dark cell—for nothin'. All for nothin'. I never did harm to any one. What's the raison it's not likely to go on ten years mōre, twenty years more, if I live?"

"That's true, Phelim," said Kevin after a little pause, "but, for all that, I feel my heart lighter than I ever thought I would again. I think we will soon hear some good news."

"I never expect to hear any good news in this world again," said Phelim. "Where would it come from, or what good would it do me? Only a little rest, when I'm sick and

not able to pick oakum or handle a crowbar—that's all I care for. But it is very hard, when your head is reelin' and your eyes blind with the dead sickness, to have to work on, or to go into the dark cell for forty-eight hours."

"Wouldn't you like to get free again—to go back to Clare again?" said Kevin after a pause, during which his spirit, grown suddenly light, was picturing bright dreams.

"No, I don't know that I would. I never thought of it. I never see any future before me, but to die in the dark cell all alone. To be found there dead some mornin', when the warder comes to give me the bread and water; be carried out to the back of the prison; be flung in with the quicklime—an' no more about me."

"Would you like to see Clare again?"

"No, I think not. What would I be doin' there?" said Phelim reflectively. "There's, most likely, no one there that remembers me, or that I'd know. Mornin', noon, and night I'd be thinkin' of that time when *they* died in the hut. Maybe no one could show me their graves. How could they? People, I'll be bound, have enough of troubles ov their own on their own minds to think ov the misfortunes of others."

The despondent manner of his companion grated on the lightness of Kevin's own spirits, and he suspended the conversation, as they reached the side of the ship and were transferred to it from the tender.

Once there, the handcuffs were removed, and until arrangements were perfected they were free to walk about the deck or to lie thereon—one or other of which most of the convicts were very happy to do

CHAPTER XIV.

THE APPARITION.

THE convict ship had been some seven or eight days at sea, when one afternoon Kevin, who had been separated from his companion, was about ascending the stairs to the deck.

As he was laying his hand on the rail to do so, a hand was laid upon his shoulder, and, turning around, his eyes rested on Clareman. He was wonderfully changed for the worse since he had last seen him. That was at the commencement of the voyage, for they had been then placed in separate compartments of the ship, between which there was no communication allowed. Kevin remarked, with some surprise, that he had altered very much. The old look of fright, and terror, and indescribable dread, that possessed his eyes when Kevin first saw him, and which the sense of companionship and friendship in the cell had helped to dissipate a great deal, was there again—was there with tenfold force. The deadly pallor of his face had returned, and it seemed to Kevin instinctively that the old fits were on Clareman again, and in a worse form !

“Phelim,” whispered he, in astonishment.

The other nodded affirmatively.

“Have you been ill? You are looking very ill.”

“I am tormented,” said he, with a look of anguish.

“Tormented?”

“Yes.”

“How?”

"*He* comes again to me worse than ever!"

"Comes again," said Kevin, finding a difficulty himself in restraining a shudder, as a feeling crept along his backbone as if cold water were rushing over it. "When?"

"Last night, an' the last before that, and the night afore that, and every night nearly!" The eyes of the man wandered with a quick look around, as if in mortal terror lest they might again fall on his tormentor.

"Where?"

"To my hammock. I sleep, you know, on the lower deck. I am dreaming that the vessel is drowning! I always dream that. I think I am in the water myself. I struggle, an' waken with my struggle! I look at the light that burns on the side of the deck, to see if I am awake or dreaming. I turn to the other side. I'd rather not turn my eyes there, but I cannot help it. *He is there*. His face is watching me all the time! He's peeping over the canvas of the hammock looking down at me. My eyes fall on his at once, and they are held there!"

"My God," said Kevin, "that is awful. Why don't you call aloud? Why don't you make the sign of the cross?"

"I can't. I am held there as in a vice. I am suffering frightfully. I live in a state of constant terror. I never feared him so much as now. I thought he was gone, as he kept away from my cell so long, but he's back again—and worse!"

"You are suffering frightfully, I see that," said Kevin.

It was easy to see it; the man's crouching, quivering look of terror showed it plainly; the white pallor of haunted fear that overspread his face, so different from the paleness

produced by delicacy or confinement, evidenced it palpably enough.

"Does any one else see him?"

"No, no one else sees him. No one else is awake to see him," said Convict No. 37, as he wiped with the back of his hand the perspiration that gathered on his forehead.

"Does he speak to you?"

"Only one word. That's all. One word. You'd think he knew what I was dreaming of."

"What is the word he says?"

"'Drowned,' 'Drowned,' 'Drowned!' That's what he says. He's saying it when I look at him. He keeps on saying it. All the time he keeps looking fixedly at me. He never once takes his eyes off me!"

"Phelim," said No. 25, after a little reflection, "how near is the nearest hammock to yours?"

"About a foot."

"At the side he comes and peeps in?"

"About a foot. It may be a little more or less, not much."

"Do you know the man that sleeps there?"

"No, I do not."

"He'd have no objection to sleep on deck where I sleep, I suppose, and let me exchange with him, if the captain liked to make the change? I'll ask the captain."

"For God's sake," said the haunted man in an imploring whisper, "don't say anything about this to the captain. *He* would grow worse an' worse."

"No," said Kevin assuringly, "I'll not make any mention of it. I'll try and get exchange made. As you were so little

tormented when we were before together, perhaps it may be so again. I shall try, however. The captain seems to be a kind man, and may allow it."

"You'll see me again—won't you, in any case?"

"I will," said Kevin. "I'll see you a little later on, after I see the captain."

"You'll do your best to get exchanged? It would be such a relief to me?"

"I'll do my best, Phelim. Never fear. It's all the same thing to him."

"Or if you could get me exchanged up to your place," suggested Clareman.

"There might be some difficulty about that, Phelim. They should displace some one on deck to do so, and that some one might object. But I'll do the best I can"—giving him an encouraging and hearty clap on the shoulder, with which they went their different ways.



CHAPTER XV.

THE SEER AND THE CYCLONE.

THE convicts had to be paraded; had to stand in order and to answer to the roll call; had to be carefully examined to see that no prohibited articles, whether of offence or defence, were secreted on their persons; had to go back and make up their hammocks with great order and neatness; had to scrub, partly tethered as they were, the decks to the whiteness of snow; and by the time all this was done, noon was passed and over.

It had been a portion of Kevin's business this day to burnish the brass surroundings of the compass stand, which he did with some care, notwithstanding that his mind was considerably perturbed over this last communication of his afflicted friend. He delayed a very considerable time over it, because he thought it would give him a good opportunity for speaking to the captain, when he came around.

He was dreadfully puzzled to know what to think of Clareman. At times he was inclined to think these dreadful visions were but the disordered fancies that arose from a mind that had partially gone astray during the sufferings of ten years; but his conversation on all other matters was so earnest and sensible, so free from hallucination of any kind, and his sufferings were so palpable and real—and so frightful—that Kevin could not help thinking there was something very strange in the comings of this unknown visitant and something very true in the sufferer's story.

"That's very odd and very strange!"

These words said just beside him, whilst he was in one of these moods of thinking, made him nearly start at his work.

Turning quickly around he found the captain at his back. He had taken no notice whatever of Convict No. 25, but had his whole attention engaged on some object which Kevin, from his position, failed to see.

To make him aware of his presence—of which he seemed wholly oblivious—Kevin gave a slight cough. The captain started in turn, for the noise had broken in upon his train of thought, and turning sharply round said—

"Who's that?"

"It is I, No. 25," said Kevin, lifting his hand to his forehead in salute.

"What are you doing here?" said he gruffly. "Oh, I see! Well, go on with your work quietly. Make no noise, and don't disturb me."

Kevin considered this was a good chance of mentioning to him his friend's condition, and soliciting permission to make the change in his sleeping place from the deck to the 'tween decks, a change which, so far as he was personally concerned, would be one for the worse. Even if the captain did not grant it he could only refuse, and there was no harm done. The knowledge of the latter fact, and his anxiety to be near his suffering friend, emboldened him, and he said to the captain—

"I want to speak to you, if you please, captain."

The captain was too much engrossed with his observations to hear him; so he repeated the words in a louder tone of voice, sufficiently so to attract his attention.

The captain turned round. He would probably have done so in an angry mood if his mind were not so full of the subject he was considering that his turning round at all was a purely mechanical action, in which his mind or attention had but little part.

"You want to speak to me—what do you want to speak to me about?" said he absently.

"I wish to get exchanged from the deck to the 'tween decks—to sleep on the 'tween decks."

"What is that for?" said the captain quickly, at once directing his attention on the speaker.

It was rather a curious and unusual and suspicious request to begin with. The captain had had some experience of convicts, and he had seen frightful scenes on board ships he commanded—and he had heard of them on others—in

consequence of lax regulation and of a lax watch being kept on their doings. He had known powerful secret organisations, in the course of a few days at sea, to be formed for the purpose of seizing the ship and murdering or drowning the officers and crew.

Men doomed to transportation—many of them for years, most of them for life—were ever ready, in their recklessness, to embrace any chance, even at the risk of their lives, of regaining their freedom. It would not be the first nor the second time that he and his crew had to fight for their lives on board his own vessel, in a furious outburst of which not the faintest signs had been previously shown.

Thoroughly mistrustful, therefore, of the favour asked, and of the motives that prompted it, and all alive to the possibility of some secret plan being on foot, he again asked sharply—

“What for?”

Rather taken aback by the abruptness of the question, Kevin was puzzled for an answer.

At last he said—

“There is a friend of mine ill, and I should like to be near him.”

“Then let the ship’s doctor see him, and at once,” said the captain, with an air of suspicion.

“I am afraid the ship’s doctor could not do much for him,” said Kevin, urged to say so partly by his knowledge that that was so, and to spare his unfortunate friend unpleasant questioning.

“Afraid the ship’s doctor could do nothing for him!” said the captain, whose suspicions were now thoroughly aroused. “Why not? Have you not said he was ill?”

"But not of an illness that the doctor can cure," said Convict No. 25, still with his hand to his forehead in salute. "He's more ill in mind than in body," added he hesitatingly.

"Send the man up here, and let the doctor see him in my presence," said the captain, as he placed a silver whistle to his lips to call some of his officers to him.

"Don't!" said Kevin, appealingly, placing his hand on his arm. "Don't. The doctor can't do him any good. He'll do him more harm than good. You don't know how he is afflicted."

There was so much that was earnest and truthful in Kevin's appealing manner that the captain paused a little.

"How is he afflicted?"

"He thinks," said Kevin, seeking with difficulty to give some account of Clareman's illness without letting out altogether his secret, "that the vessel is going to be drowned! He dreams it. He thinks a vision comes and tells him so. And so——"

He paused in his speaking as he saw the serious change that came over the captain's face. Very far from laughing at the curious malady of the convict's friend, or making light of it, he grew gravely and suddenly impressed by it.

"That the vessel will be drowned!" said he, sinking his voice to a whisper, in which, if there was nothing frightened, there was a good deal that was grave and serious. "How long has he been dreaming that?"

"Night after night," said Kevin, in the same whisper.

"Night after night," said the captain, with a slight shade of alarm growing over his face. "What's that you said about visions? Sees visions, does he?"

"I believe he does," said Kevin, who was becoming more

impressed by the matter as he saw the gravity with which the other entertained it.

"Of what kind?"

"A man comes to him at night," said Kevin, who saw no way open to him now but to tell the whole narrative, "watching him when he wakes, bending over him, looking down at him; muttering all the time, 'Drowned! drowned! drowned!'"

The captain stood with a depressing expression of alarm on his face, during the explanation, and for some time after.

"I must see this man," said he. "What is his number?"

"37," said Kevin; "but there's no use in your seeing. He won't tell you a word. He won't even speak to you on the subject."

"I'll see him at any rate," said the captain, applying the whistle to his lips.

"Tell the officer of the gunroom," said he to one of the mates who came in obedience to his call, "to send me up Convict No. ——." He hesitated for the number.

"No. 37," said Kevin, supplying him again with the number.

"Convict No. 37," said the captain, "and at once."

The officer departed on his mission.

"Do not ask him about this," said Kevin to the captain. "He exacted a promise from me that I should not, in asking this favour of the exchange from you, mention the reason. Nor would I, if I could have avoided it. You will see by his face and manner that he is suffering dreadfully—with or without reason I cannot say—but, at any rate, suffering fearfully."

"With reason, I have not the shadow of doubt," said the captain gravely. Then suddenly—"What is *your* No.?"

"No. 25," said the convict."

"Not your number—I meant your name?"

"Kevin Moore," said the convict.

"An Irishman?"

"Yes; from Ireland," said Kevin.

"What part of Ireland?"

"Westmeath—near Athlone."

"Athlone! Athlone," said the captain reflectively. "There's a friend of mine stationed there, if I don't mistake. Did you know a Colonel Montfort there?"

"Yes, well," said Kevin. "It was he arrested me, and he was nearly the last I spoke to on Irish soil."

"What were you convicted of?—but, I see!—is this the man?"

Kevin turned his eyes round, and saw advancing along the deck, in charge of one of the officers, Convict No. 37.

He answered gently "yes," as Clareman advanced and stood with eyes fixed on the ground before the captain.

"I understand you are a friend of No. 25."

Clareman raised his eyes, fixed them for a second on the captain, turned them on Kevin, threw them over the deck, and up the masts with hurried look, and said "yes."

"And you wish that he should sleep near you?"

With the same quick glance at No. 25, at the captain, and up the mast, Convict No. 37 again said "yes."

"Well, then, in that case," said the captain, "I shall accede to the wish. But instead of his sleeping below, you can come up and sleep on deck. The nights will be fine

henceforward, and as you are not strong, the change will be an agreeable one."

That it was, and would be, an agreeable one, Clareman's manner and proffered thanks at once testified. Anything other than the gloom below; anything other than the terrors of the long hours of darkness in the 'tween decks; anything for relief from those dreadful eyes, from that watching face, which darkness always evolved from its terrible mysteriousness.

So, with grateful thanks to the captain, a look of acknowledgment to Kevin, and another curious look at the masts, on which his gaze seemed to dwell for a second or two with strange interest, Convict No. 37 shuffled with unsteady step along the shifting decks, in charge of the officer, and disappeared again down the fore-castle ladder.

The captain sat, steadily looking after him for some seconds, revolving something within his own mind very seriously and very gravely.

"That's a strange-looking face," said he.

"It is," said Convict No. 25. "He has suffered a great deal."

"What's his term?"

"For life."

"How long has he been convicted?"

"Ten years."

"It's a long time."

"It is a long time," said Kevin, sorrowfully, as he thought of his own sentence. "It's no wonder strange fancies get into his head."

"If they be fancies," said the captain, with fear and perturbation manifest in his face. "They are very un-

pleasant fancies in face of this," tapping with his hand upon something which Kevin could not see, but which he heard under the captain's fingers.

Not quite understanding this remark, Kevin stood silent. The captain applied his whistle again to his mouth, and called for the first mate, who was not long in making his appearance.

Conceiving that his portion of the conversation had just ended, Convict No. 25 addressed himself to his work of brightening the brasses around the compass-stand.

The day was a beautiful one in May. The sky shone with unruffled serenity, and the sun's rays glinted from the blue crests of the rippling waves like sparkles of emerald,

The extraordinary blueness of the water, reflecting the colour of the skies above, was made to look still bluer by contrast with the pearly white foam that crested the tops of the tiny waves as they rolled on and broke against the vessel's sides.

There was no cloud—not even as large as a man's hand—visible in the blue surface of the shining sky ; and no waves, except miniature ones, disturbed the placid surface of the ocean. They had been to sea for some days, and evidently had got into pleasant southern latitudes—if the beautiful skies and the smiling sea and the entrancing warmth of the air could be taken as an indication. And the convict could not help remarking to himself, as he scrubbed and polished and brightened, what a very agreeable change it was from the horrors and the gloom of the prison cells on land. What a delightful thing freedom is—even that freedom a convict enjoys on the deck of a convict ship !

He was startled from his reverie and from his work by the mate saying, with the startled emphasis of astonishment—

"My God! that's very strange!"

"It *is* very strange!" said the captain. "It has been running down that way for the past two hours."

"There does not seem any reason for it," said the mate, with a wave of his hand to the blue bright bright sky above, and the placid sea around.

"No. Yet you see what a heavy fall there has been. There must be some curious change in the atmosphere—though otherwise there is no indication of it. There is a change coming—and rapidly."

"This barometer was regulated before we left port—was it not?" asked the mate.

"It was," said the captain, as they both again bent their attention on the instrument, "accurately set before leaving, and is, moreover, one of the best of its kind. Even as we look at it—as you see—it is steadily declining."

"So it is," said the mate, as he tapped it with his fore-finger. "So it is. It is very remarkable. There is no other indication of any atmospheric disturbance that I can see."

"This is the tell-tale, my dear sir," said the captain, taking his gaze back from the blue sky and the peaceful sea, "this is the tale-teller. It is the greatest fall I ever saw in so short a time."

"I never saw anything like it," said the mate with perturbation also in his manner. "It is unaccountable;"

"What is worse, I fear it is true," said the captain in an equally disturbed manner."

"True! Of course it's true," said the mate, "although possibly," added he on reflection, "it may be only a passing magnetic disturbance."

"I am inclined, for other reasons, to think it more—much more. There is a storm coming, and a dreadful one: of that be assured. And you had better make preparations for it."

"We had better reef in the sails."

"Yes; as we have so little wind it does not matter our standing for some time under bare poles," said the captain.

"Where are we now?"

"Nearing Finisterre. By to-night we should be off it."

"Very well; make all the preparations for a storm. Have all the convicts' hammocks removed to the 'tween decks. All. No, stay! not all. There are two, 25 and 37, that you may let stay on deck. Tell the warder to fetter the others. They are a dangerous cargo in a hurricane. Don't tell them the reason why."

"Very well," assented the mate. "It would look strange if no storm were to come."

"It would," said the captain, "though I fear that will not be the case. Look at that sky yonder."

The mate did look at the sky. So also did Kevin, who had been listening to the conversation—he could not avoid hearing it where he stood; and, at the significant words with which the captain concluded his suggestions, he could not help lifting his eyes to that portion of the sky indicated.

As he did so he was completely surprised to see what a change in so short a time had come over it!

The western portion of the sky, where the sun was, had turned into a reddish colour—not quite so much red as a sort of foggy yellow purple. Further away, but lower down, and scarcely more than lifting itself up the horizon, along which for some short distance it formed a sort of boundary,

moved slowly upwards a cloud of intense blackness. Whether it was by contrast with the brightness of the sky and the purple yellow surrounding the sun, or because of its own inherent blackness, it certainly did look ominously dark—the blackest-looking rim to a surface of bright sky that Kevin thought he had ever seen.

“That’s it!” said the mate laconically, with a significant nod of his head, as he looked earnestly and anxiously in the direction of the sky where it appeared.

After a short pause he left the captain, to carry out his orders.

“How long has this man being seeing these visions?” said the captain, as he seated himself beside Kevin, where he was engaged at his work.

“A long time, I believe,” said the latter.

“Did they ever reveal occurrences to him before?”

“I believe not—I don’t know,” said Kevin. “He did not tell me.”

“How long have you known him?”

“About four or five weeks.”

“Do you think him trustworthy?”

Kevin thought he did, and said so. Further he told very briefly what he had done for himself, as proof of his unselfish worth.

“His visitor has told him the truth this time, I fear,” said the captain. “The glass has been falling unaccountably for the past two or three hours, and that rising cloud yonder tells the reason why. We are in a very dangerous place—for all yon placid sea—to be caught in a storm.”

Saying which, he walked to the companion ladder, and descended to his cabin.

Kevin had always read of sailors being superstitious, and, glancing at the sea around him, so calm and sparkling, thought to himself that there was very little danger of a storm thereon.

He opined that Clareman's brooding fancies had raised unnecessary alarm in his mind. Kevin was but little acquainted with barometers ; they were not then—nor even now—usual or occasional adjuncts in a farmer's household. And its falling or rising, rapidly or slowly, impressed him very little.

As the sailors came up, clambering to the deck after one another in a body, Kevin noticed that each and all, as soon as his face lifted itself above deck, took sudden and quick survey of the sun and sky, and fastened their eyes, with a peculiar gleam of knowledge on their faces, on that small black cloud that was slowly lifting itself—growing more inky as it did so—above the horizon.

The calm surface of the shining sea, which he would himself have judged by, they took no heed of whatever as scarce worth their attention. Some few rushed to look at the glass, but even these were in a second of time climbing up the ladder-ropes after their companions.

In less time than Kevin thought was possible they had spread themselves out on the topsails ; were holding on to the mainsails ; were hanging from the yardarm : reefing, furling, and tying the sails.

At the same time, the warders in charge of the prisoners below had ranged them in line, and had re-fettered them. There was no danger to the ship from their violence, therefore, if a storm arose.

Neither was there danger from the sails, which were soon

carefully furled up ; and the ship standing, a skeleton of her late self, on the mirroring surface of the sea, awaited the development of the storm—if storm there should be. And that a storm was sure to come, the curiously coloured sky that surrounded the sun as he descended made manifest. It was what is generally known in these countries as an angry sky. But its wrathful appearance was heightened by the border of intense redness that tinged the black cloud, where the sun's rays touched it, and showed its inky features in such marked and striking contrast.

“That’s a threatening sky,” remarked the mate to the captain, as they both came on deck again to supervise the work that had been done.

“It is a threatening sky,” said the other in answer, “and the glass is still falling !”



CHAPTER XVI.

THE DROWNING SHIP.

THE sombre clouds in the West did not belie their indications, although the sun, as he dipped below the horizon, flung his golden beams across a sea tranquil and unruffled as a sheet of ice.

“I never saw in my experience such a sudden fall in the barometer as during the past two hours,” said the captain, as he leant over the taffrail, and looked in the direction of the setting sun.

"Yes ; it has been an alarming fall," remarked the mate, who looked in that direction also, after he had glanced upwards at the bare masts and furled sails. "I wish we were a degree or two lower down."

"Why ?"

"We should be in a much safer position. I know this place well."

"So do I."

"It's the worst place in the whole Bay of Biscay."

"I should say it is," assented the captain. "Does it not strike you that there is a suffocating feel in the air ?"

"I feel it."

"It has increased lately."

"Yes ; it's positively choking."

"It's something curious and unusual in the air !"

"I fancy it's electricity. It is not the heat."

"No, we have not got South enough yet for the simoom."

"Most extraordinary," said the mate, walking over to the glass, and again taking note of it, "there is a still further fall. What does it mean ?"

"Look here, Travers—look !"

The captain's voice ringing out sharply drew the mate quietly to his side.

"Do you see anything strange before you ?"

"No," said the mate, glancing skywards, and then seawards. "Nothing but what I have seen before."

"Look again !"

"I see nothing unusual."

"Not there ?"

The captain indicated with his finger the surface of the sea in the direction of the red sun-setted sky.

“Not there?”

Kevin who had been by permission of the captain, allowed to remain on the deck, was likewise standing some distance off, looking over the sea in the same direction.

Hearing the captain's words, he fixed his attention more earnestly on it. But all he could see was in the distance a slight ruffling and darkening of the silver surface of the water, as a slight breeze apparently came travelling at a gentle pace towards them.

“Ah!”

The mate said no more; as his eye fell on the advancing breeze; but in a frightened way fastened his gaze thereon.

“That's it,” said the captain quietly.

“Yes, I fear so,” said the mate.

“That's the forerunner.”

The mate nodded his head, as he watched still the onward but slow advance of the rippled surface of the water.

“And look!—look up! What a sky!”

“How quickly it has grown black.”

“And what a black!”

“And what a contrast with the rest.”

As Kevin lifted his eyes to where the sky was rapidly becoming hidden in a gathering cloud of inky blackness, and marvelling much at its curious and unusual appearance, he started as a hand was lightly laid on his shoulder.

“It's I, Kevin—don't start!”

“Oh, so it is,” said Kevin, looking around.

“They've let me free!”

“Free?”

“Yes; free to come to you.”

“That was very kind of them.”

"All the others are chained, as if they were going on a march."

"I'm glad you've come up."

"So am I. Do you know what, Kevin?" said he in a whisper, drawing close to the other.

"What?" said Kevin, taking his eyes off the ruffling sea and blackening sky to glance at the other's face. When he did, he noticed that the same expression of fear and restlessness was again in his eyes, the same yellow look of pallor in his face, and the old expression of being awfully frightened and hunted was about him!

"What?" said Kevin again in a whisper, although he knew well enough the cause.

"*He* has been here again?"

"Here?"

"Ay—before they took off the irons."

"In presence of the men?"

"Yes."

"What did he say?"

"The same words. But he looked so angry! Oh, so angry!"

Kevin was silent for a time.

"Phelim!" said he at last.

"Yes," said the other.

"Do you see that sky?"

"Yes," said Phelim briskly, shaking off the haunting remembrances of his visitor, and looking up.

"You never saw such a sky as that in Clare?"

"No, not so black as that at this hour. It's very black."

"It is very black," said Kevin.

"What does it mean?"

"It means that your visitor spoke the truth!" said Kevin putting his mouth to the other's ear, and whispering him the words.

"That we'll be drowned?" said No. 37, without much surprise.

"It means there is a storm coming. So the mate and captain say. And they expect it to be an awful one."

"And they've prepared for it," said No. 37, glancing up at the tightly-furled sails and bare poles. "I've often seen 'em runnin' past the shores of Clare that way when there was a gale on."

Kevin's attention was directed from his partner by the captain's exclamation—

"Here it comes!"

Slowly as it seemed to come, travelling over the countless miles of sea surface, it burst against the ship with great force, making the watchers hold on to the bulwarks, and causing the furled sails to flap against the side of the masts with great force.

The ship swayed unsteadily as the gale struck her.

"That's only the fringe; the body of the gale lies beyond," said the captain; and as Kevin looked at the latter when he spoke he noticed that his face had grown deadly pale—nearly as pale, in fact, as that of the haunted man beside him. But, for all that, there was no lack of quiet courage and self-possession visible thereon.

As the captain said, the burst of wind that had struck them was but the forerunner or advancing fringe of the hurricane.

The inky cloud that had gathered and blackened over the sunset, spread over the entire sky with marvellous rapidity. The surface of the smiling sea, now reflecting the

darkened sky above, grew likewise black. Whilst, heaping up its hitherto quiet waters into mountain waves, burst after burst of wind came along, striking the ship and hurling over her bare decks clouds of spray.

"It was well we took the precaution we did," said the captain. "We should be able to do very little with that sudden onrush of storm."

"I should never have thought of doing so from the mere falling of the glass," said the mate.

"I had another reason for it," said the captain gravely, "to which I attach even more importance."

"What was that?" asked the mate with curiosity.

"I shall tell you when the hurricane is over," said the captain; "you will say it's very remarkable. Look! did you ever see such lightning as that?"

As he spoke a flash of lightning shot out from the West, and, extending in a second all over the sky in a zig-zag direction, seemed to strike and cleave through the heavy cloud of darkness, and, fading suddenly away, left a streak of burnt-up purple-red behind it in the sky.

They had scarcely time to express their astonishment and admiration of this, when, following on its course, another line of fire streaked the sky, and another, and another, until a net-work of fiery tracks stood out against its black background.

As these zig-zag flashes of red light were in like manner reflected from the darkened surface of the sea, now rolling under the influence of the growing storm in great waves, it formed a most extraordinary and weird appearance.

The vessel herself, as she began to plunge with the rising waves, seemed almost to cower and tremble at the approach

of the unusual storm. The sea-birds came in small groups and in clusters, as if for mutual support, and took their places on the masts and in the furled-up rigging.

"The sooner we batten down the hatches the better," said the captain. "Call the men. Oh! you here!" said he, as Kevin moved from his post of observation. "I am afraid your informant was right. Is he with you? I desired him to be set free!"

"He is. He is here," whispered Kevin in return.

"You had better take your place in my cabin. You can do no good here. You would be in the way of the men during the storm."

"We seem to be in for a bad night," said Kevin, as his eye fell again on the sea and sky, lit up by the lightning.

"I never saw greater indications," said the captain, moving away.

"Come, Phelim, come!" said Kevin to his companion; "come below! Thank God! we are not to be left during the storm with the others. Come on!"

They both descended the companion-ladder, and selecting a small cabin off the captain's, took their places there; and whilst the hammering overhead indicating the battening down of the hatches, and other preparations to enable the ship to ride out the hurricane went on, Kevin watched from the little window the lightning as it shot through the sky or reflected redly in the water, whilst his companion, who had been getting very little rest of late, lay down on the sofa and went to sleep.

The storm came on apace. Gust succeeded gust, and wave succeeded wave, until the vessel rolled helplessly in the trough of the sea! And as each body of water struck

against her with the force of hundreds of tons, the timbers of the cabin creaked and strained, and the vessel staggered and moaned, as if it were a living thing, cruelly beaten by some heavy instrument !

At other times the reeling vessel plunged downwards, or some on-coming wave rolled over her, and in the darkness of the cabin and the dim light of the rushing mass of water outside, Kevin started to his feet, as a sense of suffocation came over him, and thought he was drowning.

A flash of lightning gleaming through the receding waters as the labouring vessel lifted her head again from beneath them, let the startled blood once more flow through his veins, thereby relieving the terrible feeling at his heart.

"I wonder what is Norah thinking of now?" was the question that arose in his mind. "I wonder does it ever occur to Maury that I'm so near drowning?"

But the succession of startling surprises, as the vessel pitched forward, fell back on her beam-ends, or lay helplessly on her side, gave permission but seldom for these thoughts.

A sudden and alarming roll of the vessel on her side, causing him to slip from his hold and fall, for the first time made him aware that there was water under his feet, and that for some time he had been standing in several inches of it.

"If she leaks like this everywhere she won't float much longer," thought Kevin, as his heart leaped into his mouth at the sudden discovery.

"Phelim, are you awake? Phelim!" cried he to his companion, who, with his arm through the leather fastening, had slept soundly through all the storm.

"Who's that?" said the sleeper.

"It's I—Kevin."

"Oh, so it is. Where are we? Oh, yes, now I remember. It is very stormy."

"It is. It's awful. I wonder how you could sleep so well."

"I didn't sleep so well since I came aboard."

"Not disturbed?"

"No. What's amiss with the ship?"

"There's an awful storm amiss with her," said Kevin.

"The hatches are battened down, and the ship is leaking."

"You are right there!" said the captain from behind. They turned round. He was standing at the entrance of the little cabin, his sou-wester and oil-cloth covering glistening with spray and wet.

"You are quite right there. Can you both work? Work at the pumps?"

"If we can stand," answered Kevin, who had difficulty in retaining his feet, even with the assistance of his hands, holding on to the window; "we can work."

"Come along then. We can lash you to the pumps. The men are nearly exhausted already. The water is gaining fast."

It would be hard for it to fail in gaining, Kevin thought, as a huge wave, lifting itself sheerly up, struck against the poop of the vessel, making it quiver and tremble through its whole length. A succession of these would sever its fastenings though they were made of triple steel.

"Any sign of the storm going down?" asked Kevin as they ascended the companion-ladder.

"None," said the captain.

That there was none the most unskilful eye might see from the deck.

The storm roared and howled with shrieking force among the ropes and cordage ; and its increasing pressure upon the sides of the ship was making her run with great speed even under bare poles. And whenever a wave, rushing past, bore her, broadside, clumsily on its summit, the sheer force of the continuous pressure of the hurricane against her threw her immediately on her side, so that her tall masts lay nearly prone on the water.

One of these occasions occurred just as they had taken their positions at the pump, and had been safely lashed thereto, to prevent their being swept away by the wind or sea.

As the vessel lay thus, a following wave, striking against her keel, nearly turned her over and capsized her.

"She'll never right herself !" said one of the sailors at work with them, as they suspended operations, the horizontal position of the pumps preventing them from working.

It would, indeed, seem as if she would not, for the suction of the water on her furled sails and on her masts, as well as the pressure of the hurricane, prevented her from righting.

A wave passing over, however, freed her from the grasp of the water, and, with a rapid twist, or turn, she righted herself.

The rapidity of the motion, however, produced an unexpected shock.

"What's that ?" said Kevin to one of his fellow-workers as the floor of the deck trembled beneath them.

"The mast has gone—that's what it is," said the sailor.

Looking round, Kevin saw that the mast had broken

across a few feet above the deck, and now, in a vast entanglement of ropes, was lying over the side of the vessel, the top dipping in the water, and pulling down visibly the deck of the ship in that direction.

The piping of the whistle of the mate, however, brought some of the sailors with hatchets to the rescue ; and after some rapid and energetic working the broken mast, with its entourage of ropes and furled sails, was cut adrift. They could see it, when the lightning gleamed, lying an unwieldy monster on the top of the wave ; its broken end occasionally lifting higher in the air, and its long lines of severed cordage blown streaming about with the resistless force of the hurricane.

The workers at the pump laboured unceasingly. The strained planks of the ship freely admitted the water ; and it required all their vigour and untiring energies to keep it from gaining too much on them. Only a few hands could aid ; but those who had been assisting for the past few hours being relieved, the fresh hands worked with ceaseless vigour and activity. At times, indeed, they were obliged to suspend work, as the plunging ship rolled in the water, or as a breaking wave swept with mighty force across the deck, or the tremendous force of the wind made exertion or breathing almost impossible. But, whenever these circumstances did not interfere, they worked with right good-will and carelessness of fatigue—as men only do when they are striving foot to foot with the gaining sea for their lives.

As the storm continued, and the shaken vessel leaked more and more, the water gained on them, and sometimes they found it almost impossible to work the pumps or to make the piston move, so great was the pressure on the rod.

From time to time the captain came to see how they were doing. From time to time came also the mate.

But the last time the pumps had got fast with the suction and force of the water below, and they could not work them.

"We can do no more," said one of the sailors, in reply to his inquiry.

"Are the pumps stopped?" asked the mate, coming up at the moment.

"They are drowned out," said the captain, with a face full of seriousness and gravity, but free from any manifestation of timidity. "It would be useless to work them further. There is too much water below."

"What shall be done? She cannot long tumble about with this load of water in her. She will sink any moment."

"She may," said the captain. "The first thing to do is, strike off all the fetters off the convicts, and bring them on deck. Let them get a chance for their lives."

"And the boats?"

"You could not launch a boat in this storm. It would be smashed against the vessel or swamped immediately. Cut them loose."

"Cut them loose!"

"Yes. They may save some one later on. But first bring the convicts on deck. They must not drown like rats in the hold. Let them die battling for their lives, with the air and the sky around them."

"And be quick!" added he, as the mate paused to examine the pumps; "the vessel is sinking deeper and tumbling about more helplessly. She will go down with a run any moment!"

"Well, Phelim, what do you think of this?" asked Kevin in a breathless whisper.

"I don't know," said Phelim. The storm and the unwonted exercise had lent a freshness of spirit to him that was surprising to see. "I suppose we must do what the others do."

"Can you swim?"

"I could, years ago ——"

"So can I," said Kevin interrupting.

"But I don't know that I can now. It's ten years you know. Ten long years."

"One never forgets to swim, I think."

"Maybe not."

"No ; we must try and save ourselves ; stick close to me, Phelim. The deck will be crowded in a few minutes. There go the boats."

The boats had been cut adrift and hove over the sides of the vessel. Some of them were capsized and sank immediately ! some were staved in against the side of the vessel, and some they could see floating away on the crest of the receding waves.

Simultaneously with the cutting loose of the boats, the released convicts rushed on deck. Many of them had been badly hurt and bruised in the incessant rollings and pitchings of the vessel, and most of them had grown faint with the confined air below ; but all of them hailed their temporary release with shouts of acclamation, and rushed with loud cries on deck, tumbling and falling over one another as they did so.

All attempts to save the vessel were now at an end. The men working at the pumps untied themselves from their fastenings, and held on with their hands.

All at once a cry of "She's sinking !" arose from three hundred mouths as a passing wave bore down her stern, and, breaking with great force over the deck, rushed along !

Catching in its rapid swoop the workers at the pumps it swept them off their feet ; and as a flash of lightning burst over the deck and over the crowded faces thereon, showing the blackness of the sky and the white crests of the gleaming waves in greater force, they were borne out to sea, and the rushing water closed over them !

For a moment only, however, for, with a rapid movement of his hands, Kevin lifted his head above the surface.

And as he did so, a hand clutched his arm.

Turning his head round he found it was his fellow-convict.

"Let go, Phelim !" screamed he in the other's ears.

"Let go ; or you'll drown us both ! Let me hold you !"

Phelim let go his hold, and Kevin catching hold of his arm with one hand, and with the other battling with the waves, managed to hold him up, and kept his head above the surface.

In one of those frantic efforts, and just when his strength was beginning to fail, his up-thrown hand struck against something. In a second more he had clutched a rope, and, almost at the same moment, he knew that the cut-away mast of the ship was floating beside him.

"Can you hold this, Phelim ? Try and lay hold of this !" shouted he, as he guided his companion's hand to the rope.

Having done this, he lifted himself by the aid of a rope on to the mast, and placed himself athwart it, the ropes that ran beside it affording firm footing for his feet. He next lifted up his companion, and, as he struck the blinding spray from his own eyes, fastened him securely on the floating mast.

And thus through the long night, while the waves ran and the hurricane blew, and the lightning streaked the inky skies, they wandered on through the unknown sea !

“ A hand ! give me a hand ! ”

The words coming in the lull of the storm attracted Kevin's torpid attention.

Looking around him, he saw, a few feet from him, a form clinging to a spar, the arms thrown around it, and the head alone visible above the water.

The day was beginning to break, and the white surface of the surf-covered sea began to brighten as the rays of the early dawn fell upon it.

“ Why, it's the captain ! ”

“ Is it ? ” said Phelim, as the words fell on his ear, and he relaxed his strained hold on the rope before him.

“ Can you catch this rope ? ” said Kevin, as he caught up an end of one of the flapping ropes beside him.

“ No,” said the captain. “ My arms are too stiff. Try and reach this, and draw it near. If I let go I shall sink.”

A lurch of the wave brought the spar something nearer, and Kevin stretching forward his hand caught it and drew it alongside.

“ Give me your hand now.”

“ Take hold of it. I cannot let go ! ”

Kevin caught hold of the clinging hand, and gently unlocking its grasp, drew the captain near, and helped him to a seat on the mast before him, and between himself and Convict No. 37.

He was too weak and too numb in his limbs to be able to sit steadily ; so Kevin, holding him until he was in some degree able to keep a firm seat, they all clung to the mast

as it rose and fell and twisted and turned on the waves for hours.

"What are these clouds in front of us?" asked, at last, Kevin, as he noticed black banks of clouds facing them.

"These are not clouds," said the captain when he recovered somewhat. "These are the bluffs of the French coast, and, thank God! we are beating rapidly on to them."

"The French coast!" said Kevin, as his heart leaped rejoicing at the news.

"The French coast!" said Phelim, as a dream of liberty sent the blood rushing to his heart, and back again.

"Yes, the French coast," said the captain. "I know it well. I was wrecked here once before. We are driving straight to it. The mast, with its cords and sails, acts like a boat."

"Thank God!" said Kevin fervently.

"Thank God!" said Phelim.

"You may well say 'Thank God,'" said the captain. "We have so far had a wonderful escape."

"What's become of the ship?" asked Kevin.

"Sunk—drowned!" said the captain.

"And the"—he was going to say "convicts," but he said "passengers?"

"I believe all drowned."

"All drowned?"

"Yes; she sank under our feet. She's resting on the bottom long ago—hours ago."

"How did you escape?"

"Swam out and clung to the spar. And you?"

"Happened by chance to grasp the ropes of this," said Kevin, motioning to the mast on which they were sitting.

"And your companion?"

"Did likewise."

"You were very fortunate."

"Which we may, under God, thank you for."

"Well, you've repaid me," said the captain gratefully.

"If we can steer her safe to a landing place now! This surf near the shore is the most dangerous place of all."

With gradual growth of the brightening morning the gale abated. But the sea still remained very rough, and as the tide was flowing, the mast still was beaten shorewards by each succeeding wave.

Nearer and nearer by rapid degrees it advanced.

First, the cloud-like horizon grew more distinct, and gave way to the hills and uplands. Then came white houses in the distance, on which the rising sun shed its pleasant rays, as indeed it did also on the white surf rushing past them—turning its crest into emerald and gold. Then also in the distance came clearer the rocks on the cliff, then the shining strands glistening with summer heat. Then they could see the bathing places, whereon crowds of people seemed to be assembled.

"Have you a handkerchief?" asked the captain.

Kevin said "No. Convicts," said he brightly, "were not provided with them."

"You're not likely to be convicts long now," replied the captain; an assurance which, although they had realized that fact long before, nevertheless added a new delight to their hearts and a new vigour to their arms.

"If you can put your hand in my pocket," said the captain, "you will find one."

"I'll try."

"Have you got it?"

"Yes."

"Then hold it up. Have you anything to hold it up with?"

"No," said Kevin, looking around for something.

"There's a piece of wreck, a floating splinter on the water. Could you reach it?"

"Yes; I've got it," said Kevin, as, after some dabbling with his foot, he succeeded in attracting it within reach.

"Put it through the handkerchief. Hold it up and wave it. They may see it."

Kevin did so, and sitting as upright as he could, waved the handkerchief—waved it for some time.

"They see it!" exclaimed the captain joyfully.

"Are you certain?"

"Yes. At least I think so."

"No?"

"Yes, they do! Wave it again. Yes, they are running for the boats. They have launched them!"

"Are they coming this way?"

Kevin's position behind the others did not enable him to distinguish their movements.

"No, they're not, I'm afraid. They're going South. Keep waving the signal."

"My arms are growing tired," said Kevin. "I shall reel and fall off. I'm quite giddy, My head is reeling."

"Yes, they are! they are!" cried the captain. "They are pulling straight this way. Hurrah!"

They were indeed pulling straight in their direction. Lusty hands and manly forms, with the red and white caps of the Garronese fishermen, were pulling seaward rapidly towards them.

So rapidly that what was at first but a mere dim speck on the water, in thirty minutes or so showed itself to be a large boat pulled by six lusty oars, that, now riding on a white-capped wave, now hidden from them in the trough of the sea, ever and always bravely came nearer and nearer.

No sentenced man in Ireland years ago on the scaffold awaiting a reprieve, looked more anxiously for the white flag waving in the messenger's hands than did the men tumbling in on the broken mast look for the boat, as it dipped in the trough of the sea to re-appear on the crest of the snow-white wave!

Very soon, however, they came beside. Very soon their swarthy countenances, pleasant and smiling and full of welcome, took survey of them. And very soon the hail of voices speaking a tongue which none of them understood—save in its import of help and welcome and congratulation—came on their ears!

A grappling iron was quickly thrown to catch the mast, and friendly arms were extended to lift them off.

Kevin first, as being the readiest with his hands to help himself inboard; the captain next, as having less use of himself, his limbs being numb with long suspension in the water.

And Phelim.

"What about Phelim? What's amiss with Phelim?" asked Kevin in great alarm, as three or four fishermen, leaning over the side of the boat, sought to break his hold on the ropes.

"What's amiss with Phelim? He's dead!" burst out Kevin, as he now remembered that for some time past he had not spoken.

"No, he's not dead," said the captain, as he bent over where the French fishermen were firmly but kindly essaying to relieve his tight grasp on the ropes, and to lift him in. "But he's insensible. The fatigue was too much for him."

"Perhaps the approach of freedom was too much for him," thought Kevin. "Ten years, poor fellow! Ten years was a long time."

The ready hands of the Frenchmen with some difficulty shortened the matter by cutting the ropes that he held on to, and lifting his stiffened form into the boat.

Casting the mast adrift, they devoted their attention to him, and whilst one chafed his hands, another bound his feet in warm blankets, and a third gently poured a few drops of strong brandy down his throat.

Thus, steadily rowing back, they reached the land of France and freedom.



CHAPTER XVII.

MEETING OF THE WHITEFEET.

"WE'RE glad you're come, Mr. Canavan," said a voice as he entered.

The salutation proceeded from one of a number of people that were sitting on some fallen fragments of a wall. Their bare feet in the moonlight shone with great distinctness, and as this struck him, a voice which he at once recognised said—

"First meeting of the Whitefeet, Harry."

"No, but of the Barefeet," spoke another.

"No, the Whitefeet—the Whitefeet!"

"Yes, I think it shall be the Whitefeet," said the Prophet.
"It's a good name. It's striking and appropriate."

"The Whitefeet then be it," said all acquiescingly.

And so a name long memorable in the annals of Ireland was instituted. A name which has written itself strongly on the statute-book ; still more strongly on the penal registers of Ireland ; but still more markedly on the hearts of the farmers of the land.

"How many are here?" asked Darby.

"Sixteen ; I counted 'em already," said the man who made music with his heel on the tombstone at the funeral.

"And the men on guard?"

"Ay ; that'll make twenty."

"Enough to do good work," said the music-maker.

"Who's to tell us what's to be done, now that we are here?"

"Wouldn't it be well to take the names of all that are here?" said Darby Kelly, cautiously. "It's no harm to know 'em all. Who'll take 'em?"

"Yes, yes, take 'em down. Let's know 'em all," said the members, catching up the unexpected intention of the suggestion.

"Who'll take 'em?"

"Will you, Mr. Canavan?"

"Certainly," said the Prophet, coming out from where he stood in the shadow into the moonlight. "Certainly. Every one should lend a hand. If you don't—one and all, big and little, rich and poor, young and old—stand by one another now, there won't be one of your seed and breed left in the country this time five years. And," said he, as his tall, slender form stood out in relief—in strong relief—against the moonlight, "remember ! I say it. I, who have

no object of my own to gain. I hold no land. I never shall. But I love to think that the people, many of them my relations, and all of them my friends, who live on the land now, shall live there until they are carried to the graveyard outside; and that their children and children's children after them may live there too in peace and happiness. And I warn you to remember that, without banding yourselves together closely, there is no hope for this. Remember the story of the bundle of sticks. Now. Give me the names?"

"Maybe," said Darby Kelly, interposing, "it wouldn't be fair to take the names until you see whether they are all ov the one mind in regard to what we may be goin' to agree to."

"No; take the names! take the names!" was chorused by many. "You can sthrek 'em out after if they want id."

In deference to this nearly unanimous wish, the Prophet, writing with his pencil, took down the names of those present—took down also the names of those who kept watch and ward at the entrances.

"Now, then, boys," said the Prophet, "that's done. There's no use in remaining longer here in your bare feet, with the cold dew on the grass, than you can help." He said this as the white feet of the parties assembled showed through the darkness. "So anyone who has a proposal to make had better do so."

"You spake sound, Mister Canavan," said the music-maker, standing up, "as you always do. What I say is: we can't stand this much longer. We won't be in the land ov Ireland at all this time twelve months if we don't do something for ourselves. Our land is bein' taken bit by bit

from us, an' we'll soon have none ov id. I say now, an' I mane id when I say id, I'll let no man, whether an Irishman—a black sheep ov an Irishman—or a Scotch grazier take or hould a foot of land that I own. No; so help me God! Though I died on the scaffold high!"

The vigour and earnestness with which the music-maker said this could have been felt through the air, in the blackest night that ever closed over Egypt, so much will, determination and volition there were in his words!

"There!" said Charley. "There! that's right! That's beginnin' at the beginnin'. As long as they're allowed to bid an' bid an' hould the lands, so long the people 'll be turned out."

"Aye, will they," said Darby, with vehement concurrence.

"You've hit the nail on the head at wanst," said Charley, lifting his athletic form from the seat, to clap the music-maker on the back. "That's the first thing to do."

"Very well," said the Prophet. "Let us reduce this to writing."

"Just so."

"That's right."

"Put it down on paper."

"Read it out, an' let all agree to it."

Exclamations like these resounded on all sides.

"Very well, boys," said the Prophet, writing in the moonlight. "Here it is:—

"Rule No. 1.—That no one shall be allowed or permitted to take lands of another."

"Say no Scotchman, Englishman, or Irishman," said one, anxious to define the matter.

"No ; he says 'No one,'" said several voices. "That covers all."

"How is that to be carried out?" asked Darby Kelly, in a half-whisper.

"In any way. In any way that's necessary ; but it must be carried out."

"I wouldn't do it athout givin' 'em notice. I'd warn 'em off first," said Charley.

"That's fair enough," said the music-maker.

"Put it down. Let it be left to three or four men selected to carry out the order. First give 'em notis."

"But how is to be carried out?"

"No matter how, so long as they do carry it out."

"No, I say : First give 'em notis."

"How is the notice to be given?" asked the Prophet, as he duly reduced the order to writing.

"Put the notis on the doore," said Darby Kelly.

"No," said the music-maker ; "that would only lade to thransportation or hangin' ; it would be runnin' into the lion's mouth, an' for no use. I say, post it to 'em ; or, better again, dig a grave on the farm, and lave the notice in it. They'll surely get that. They'll know the mainin' ov that. Anybody can send a letter. There's not much pluck nor spirit nor danger in doin' it. But anybody won't dig a grave wid the gallows or the convict ship at his back."

"You're right there."

"Good man !"

"That's the way to say it !" came from several.

"Yes, I think so," said the Prophet. "A notice like that commends itself to their attention. Nobody would mind a letter. The landlord himself, or his wife, might do that."

"An' they often do," chorused several voices.

"Here's the Rules now, boys. Stand up. Draw closer and listen."

"'Rule No. 1.—That no one shall be permitted or allowed to take the lands of another.'

"'Rule No. 2.—That all who in the past or in the future took, or shall take, the lands of an evicted tenant shall be warned to give them up.'

"'Rule No. 3.—That the form of notice to be adopted and recognised by this assembly shall be the digging of a grave on some portion of the grounds, and the placing therein of the forbidden notice.'

"Has anyone anything to say about those rules?" asked the Prophet, after reading them.

"I think," said Darby Kelly, "there ought to be a time mentioned. I'd say seven days after for 'em to give up the lands. Their blood be upon their own heads then if they refuse."

"No, no," said Charley. "I'd give 'em more time. I'd give 'em a month. A week is too short. I'd give 'em fair straight notis, an' act upon it, athout fail, when the time was up."

"Yes, yes; that's fair. Let it be a month's notis. A week 'ud be too short," cried several.

"Very well," said the Prophet. "Here is Rule No. 4, then—

"'That the time given in such notice shall be one month.' Do you agree to that?"

"Yes, yes—to be sure," was echoed around.

"Well, boys," said Darby Kelly, standing up, "I think if these rules be carried out, the divil a manv you'll find turned

out in this country agin. If the landlords find their farms idle, they'll pause a bit before they turn out the present tenants."

"You make a great mistake if you think that," said the music-maker; "half ov 'em if they wor beggared an' starvin' 'ud keep turnin' out the people just to show their power, an' not to be put down. That must be stopped too. They must see that they're in danger themselves as well as the grabbers."

"Aye, just so," said Charley, interrupting! "the devil's good luck to 'em!—they'd suffer imprisonment an' loss themselves just to show how they're able to drive the tenants to starvation and beggary. The only thing the cowardly dogs are afraid ov is their lives!"

"The sorra thruer word than that you, nor many that's oulder than you, ever spoke, Charley," said the music-maker. "What's fifty or sixty pounds a year—the rent of one farm—to one ov 'em. But look at the ruin an' misfortune the loss ov the farm is to the tenant an' his wife, an' his little gossoons an' colleens. The landlord an' his wife 'll never be a cup of tay the poorer for it; but the tenant and his family 'll be in misery and sorra an' starvation until they go into the clay. The work won't be half done if you lave him out."

"Maybe you're right," said Darby Kelly thoughtfully.

"Maybe I'm right! Don't you know I'm right?"

"That's all very well wid Sir Hardinge," said a young fellow. "He's at home here. What 'll you do wid them that are off in London or in Paris?"

"What 'll we do wid 'em? Sarve the wan the same as the other. Let the man in London or Paris find out he's no safer from his misdeeds than the wan in Grangemore. Let

'em all larn that the people must live in the land, an' won't let their childre be turned out to starve," said the music-maker.

"Aye," said Darby, who, notwithstanding his depressed appearance, had a vein of dry humour in him, which latter days had turned into a gloomy and saturnine channel, "let 'em know for certain that the people of this counthry have the very same right to live in pace and quietness as the people that live in England, or France, or Spain, or anywhere else. Because if God didn't intend that they would, He'd have printed it on the side of the mountains, or put it up on a big board over Westmeath, an' printed on it, in big letters, 'The people that live here aren't to be like other people, bekaise they've no right to be here at all.' That's what He'd have said."

"Aye," said another young fellow jokingly, "or He'd have written it on the Shannon river itself. 'This is the landlords' ground; an' they may keep it idle or not as they like.'"

"No," said Charley, ready always to adopt anything that had a touch of humour in it; "but He'd have printed it on the sky wid a lot of stars in the darkness of night, so that all Westmeath could see it—an' big enough not to hurt the landlords' eyes thryin' to read it, 'This land was given to Queen Bess an' Oliver Cromwell, an' other saints, an' to their seed, breed, an' generation, an' friends an' relations, for ever, an' they may do what they like wid it.'"

"Stop this," said the Prophet, interposing authoritatively, "this borders on profanation. It is putting a palpable truth almost sacrilegiously. Is there any one to say what's to be done with regard to this proposal?"

"Do you mean in regard to the landlords?" said the music-maker.

"Yes," said the Prophet.

"Well, I say, boys!—an' you ought to listen to me. Listen to me all ov you! If you want to stay in Westmeath, and live there in comfort wid your wives and families—or the young fellows wid their fathers and mothers—you must make the landlords do what is right, as well as the land-grabbers. Just the same. An' I say now that you must be prepared to carry out the rule that's made, whether they live in London or Paris or elsewhere. It's very aisy to find out."

"Aisy enough, if it comes to that," said Darby.

"Well, boys, the night is growing late; suspicion may attach to your being out so late; and in any case we're too long here in the dank grass wet with dew. Here's the rule, as I have drafted it—

"'No. 5.—That a notice personally served to be given to every exterminating landlord, and that the expenses incurred thereby be made up by subscription. That one month's notice be given him—which notice the server be solemnly sworn to carry out wherever he may be.'"

"Yes, that's right," was assentingly whispered through the gathering.

"Now, boys, here's just one other thing," said the Prophet. "These rules must be carried out. They must be enforced, else our time is completely wasted here to-night. A meeting cannot carry them out. You must delegate the work to a committee of three or four, with full powers to them to enforce these rules, raise moneys, and pay men. Whom will you appoint? Appoint good, active men, for the rules made here to-night will soon rule all Westmeath. You must know

them already without much thinking. So, boys, make up your minds, and be quick. It's growing late."

The committee was not long in being formed. The prominent men were well known, and in everybody's mind. So the names of the music-maker, Charley, Darby Kelly, and, finally, much against his will, of the Prophet himself, with two others—old men and cautious—were named and appointed on the committee.

"Very well, boys," said the Prophet, "you have made the rules and heard them read. Also you've appointed the committee, and know their names. Now, stand up! Stand up in the moonlight! You need not swear. But all who agree to the rules, and prepare to abide by them, hold up their hands. Say after me:—'In the name of God, who made this land of Ireland for the Irish race, and who ordained that men should live in freedom, we promise to abide by these rules and to carry them out, and to obey the orders of the committee when called on.' All who agree to that lift their right hands in the moonlight." All did so.

"Now, boys, remember! No oath that shoneen magistrate or his clerk ever gave you on his greasy book in court is half so binding and solemn as that. The maledictions of God will follow the breaker of it. It is the form of oath St. Patrick left in the Book of Downpatrick to be used by the Irish people in times of danger of enemies and invasion; and anyone who breaks it will die like Dermott, with the flesh stripping off his bones and the limbs rotting asunder from his body."

As the youth stood upright, with his arm still extended in the moonlight, it would be hard to convey an idea of a more striking figure.

His words as he uttered them, standing with arm uplifted in the moonlight, were very impressive.

"We'll keep our words."

"Don't fear us."

"Send for us when you want us."

"Anything is better than beggary or the poorhouse."

"I'd die on the gallows any day afore I'd let another take my farm."

Such expressions as these, repeated from one and another, answered the adjuration of the speaker.

"I think we may go now, boys," said the Prophet, as a heavy fit of coughing admonished him that he had been already too long under the night air. "We have nothing more to do to-night. You will get notice when you are wanted again. Go different ways through the bog, so that too many of you won't be seen together :—and good-night !"

"Good-night ! good-night !" resounded in whispered words on all sides, as the barefooted members took their departure, waiting until they got through the quaking morasses of the bog to put on their shoes.

Darby Kelly, the music-maker, Charley, and the Prophet, remained a little behind, to talk and discuss the future arrangements, but they soon broke up also.

"That's been a good night's work, Harry," said Charley, as they passed from the ruins out into the graveyard, and stood a moment in the shadow of a headstone.

"If it's well carried out," said the Prophet.

"So it will. Don't fear that. We'll have no more Kevin Moores going out of the country, or I'm mistaken."

"I hope not," said the Prophet depressedly.

"You may be certain ov it," said Charley.

"It's sad enough to have one Kevin Moore," said the Prophet still sadly.

"That puts me in mind," said Charley more lively, "about Norah."

"Yes," said the Prophet brightening, "you said she was in the country."

"So she is."

"What brought her back?"

"I don't know."

"How long is she back?"

"A day or two."

"Where is she?"

"I am not sure I ought to tell you."

"Why?"

"It's a secret."

"It needn't be a secret from me."

"No more it needn't, Harry," said the other warmly. "You wor the constant friend to 'em whin they wor in thrubble. If a friend could have done good to 'em, you'd have done it. But it wasn't to be done."

"No, it wasn't," assented the Prophet sorrowfully.

"No. But as to Norah!"

"Poor Norah. Yes?"

"You couldn't guess where she's stoppin'?"

"No, I could not."

"Well, ov all the places in the world ——"

"Yes."

"She's stoppin' wid Maury Keeffe an' her mother."

"With Maury Keeffe!—what brought her there?"

"Sorra know I know. Maybeshecame back to have a look attheouldplaceagain. Whoknows? I don't. Butsheisthere."

"Well, I'm glad you told me. I should like to see her. I wonder has she any news of Kevin? But I am sure she has not, poor girl. How could she?"

"Why?"

"Why? What do you ask that for?"

"For reasons."

"What reasons?"

"Didn't you hear?"

"Hear what?"

"The news."

"What news?"

"Oh, well if you haven't heard it, I won't tell you," said Charley.

"Well, I declare," said the Prophet, who was very much struck, and very much annoyed by this mysterious evasiveness, "you are very tormenting all this day. What news is there, and if there be news, why don't you tell it? What harm can there be in telling it?"

"You'll hear it all time enough," said Charley laconically. "Good-bye, Harry. I'll take my way across the bog. I know the paths across the dry places. I can make them out readily in the moonlight. You'll know it all time enough, never fear."

"Good-bye, and safe home. I'm sorry you couldn't tell the news—whatever it is."

"You'll know it time enough, never fear," was the answer of the other, as he took his way through the shadowy valley of the tombstones, over the graveyard wall, and into the secluding blackness of the turf-heaps of the surrounding bog.

Left to himself, the Prophet was lost in a state of anxious bewilderment.

"What brought Norah Moore back? What brought her back from France to stay in that humble home?"

"And what was the news of Kevin which appeared to be about, but of which he had heard nothing?"

Lost in confused meditation of this kind, the Prophet took his hesitating way to the churchyard gate. Arrived thereat, he lifted his hat, and kneeling on a tombstone over which the moss had made a grey carpet, he said a parting prayer for the silent sleepers he was leaving behind him.

The which being over, he took his way along the rough path that led through the bog, and gained the high road that skirted it on the far side.

He was feeling weak and tired. He had not been strong lately. Unknown to himself the fangs of disease—of that slow and consuming disease wherefor there is no remedy and no hope—were eating their way slowly through his veins and to his heart. Therefore, he leant himself against the stone pier of the gateway that abutted on the road, to rest himself and to think.

"What are you doing here?"

The words came on his ears and abstracted attention with startling effect. He started to his feet and looked around him.

There was no person near that he could see. Certainly not on the roadway, where the moon fell on the dust, making it appear white as a snowfall.

"Who spoke?" he asked.

"I did," said a voice, and the owner of the voice came from out the shadow of a tree.

"What did you ask?"

"What you were doing here?"

"Who are you?"

"I am Sir Hardinge's steward."

"Does the road belong to you?" asked the Prophet.

"No."

"No?"

"Well?"

The cool question of the youth discomfited him not a little.

"I thought you put the first question," said the Prophet, laughing at the sudden come down of the other. "Aren't you satisfied with your answer?"

"It's a late hour to be out," said the steward with an undercurrent of menace.

"So it is for you also. What of that?"

"If Sir Hardinge knew of it," said the steward.

"Sir Hardinge may know what he chooses to learn. I have as good a right to be here as he has. Mayhap better. Certainly better than you have."

"Take care I wouldn't bring you before him as a trespasser—I'm his steward," said the other, whose courage was reviving fast afresh, as he saw the slim form of the youth now standing out in the moonlight, and contrasted it with his own burly form.

"I know you well. Who does not, to their sorrow? But you'd better not try that!" The steward was moving towards him with menacing gestures.

"No—why not?" said the latter, laying his hand on his coat collar.

"For that reason!" said the Prophet, with a quick trip and thrust that sent the awkward form of the other sprawling on the white dust of the road with a heavy fall. "For that reason!"

The Prophet had been a good wrestler, "with the hand," as it is phrased in country parlance ; and though not strong enough for "body-hoults" he was always rapid and quick enough with the feet to throw one considerably heavier than himself. He had not practised at it for three or four years, but enough of his old skill, if not of his old strength, remained to floor the inexperienced steward.

"You'll suffer for this," said the latter, as he raised himself from the dust.

"You'll get worse falls than that before long," said the Prophet, surveying him peaceably as he rose. He had taken instinctive note of the evanescent courage of the other, and felt quite at his ease.

"You'll see whether I will or not," said the other humbly but malevolently.

"You will ! Do you know that the farm you did so much wrong to get is gone from you ? Do you know that you will never till an acre of it ?"

"No, I don't," said the steward, who in the new fall forgot the other.

"Well, it's the case. Go home and inquire ! And see that you forget this adventure. Or it may be the forerunner of worse."

And with this unguarded intimation he turned on his heel and left him.

The road which he turned to go was not the way home, a matter which he did not think of for some seconds after he had turned his back on the steward.

Notwithstanding his desire to keep cool, the little tussle had considerably heated him, and he felt the effects of it now.

He would have turned back and gone home, but the embarrassment and awkwardness of having to meet and pass the steward prevented him, and he continued walking onwards.

"It's just a mile," thought he. "I'll go on and call at Maury Keeffe's. I'll make some excuse or other. Maybe I'd see Norah. God knows I'd be glad to see her."

With which sudden resolution forming in his mind, he walked more rapidly forward until he came to that part of the high road where the breen leading to the house joined it, and turning up soon came in sight of the house itself.

"The light is in the window," said he as soon as he came in view. "They're not gone to bed yet."

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE FAIRIES OF ORCHARD HOUSE.

RUPERT had often, like many another high-hearted youth, whose blood coursed in healthy circles through his veins, and whose brain received no taint from unworthy courses, dreamt dreams wherein beautiful beings passed and repassed before his vision.

But as he wandered along the banks of the winding stream, and as his foot trod on the grassy carpet, thinking of Miss Hargrave, his eyes were destined to fall on a face before which not alone hers, but the brightest face that ever passed through his dreams, were destined to lose their loveliness.

The path deflected from the side of the tiny stream, whose careless wanderings up to this it had followed, and took

its way, somewhat to his surprise—for his feet had been following it unconsciously and the ripple of the musical stream was in his appreciative ears—through a meadow and thence to a stile, over the steps of which the tops of trees showed themselves.

“I had better take this path, and follow it. Miss Hargrave said so. Most probably I shall find the house beyond to be the one Joe is in. Poor fellow! It is a curious meeting after our adventure.”

With some such thoughts as these in his head, he turned his feet stilewards from the river and ascended the sloping ground that led thereto.

“An orchard! Apple trees, I declare. This does indeed look something like Devonshire. I hope I am not trespassing in entering. I know I should in my native country. I can plead in any case my mission, and my being a stranger.”

So, with the confidence of youth, he had made up his mind whilst he approached, and crossed the stile.

The day was approaching noon when he reached there. The warm sun poured its rays through the spreading branches, making their leaves dance and glisten with reflected light, and fell in unsteady and broken patches on the green sward surrounding their roots—the leaves above trembling with every passing zephyr, giving an ever-altering and changing appearance to these irregular patches of beautiful sunlight. Above his head, within reach of his hand, hung heavily, drooping with the weight of golden fruit, the branches. Here, a cluster of red apples tempting in their lusciousness. There, extending in bounteous succession up the thin branch, that seemed unable to carry them, the tempting fruit, until it reached the main trunk.

The air was full of their perfume ; and the white gable of the house at the further end, standing out in striking contrast with the rich green of the shimmering leaves and the russet-brown of the mossy trunk, formed a homely and attractive, if not romantic, scene.

"Yes ! this is something sweet," he thought. "This is really pretty."

He passed through it, taking quick notice of its beauties ; now taking a peep through its network of branches at the blue sky, flecked with white clouds above, and again at the heavy masses of fruit that were heaviest and thickest where the trees lifted themselves into the light and air.

Finally, in his heedless wanderings he approached the gate at the gable end that led into the garden at the front of the house ; and there, with his hand on the upper rail, preparing to open it, he suddenly stopped !

Within the garden, which mostly consisted of gooseberry bushes, strawberry plants, and rose trees, the sun lay in an undisturbed shower of golden light—in so softening a flood of splendour that the opening roses, whether white or red, lay basking sensuously in its ripening heat, drinking their rich colours from out its delightful rays. So, too, the rich berries drank from *them* their luscious sweetness and attractive hues.

Within the garden, however, under the shade of a small pear tree, the only tree therein, sat two girls, before whom, when his astonished eyes rested on them, the red and pale hues of the fruit trees, and the rich presence of the sunlight seemed to lose their charm.

As he stood stock-still at the gate his eyes seemed all at once to drink in more of earthly beauty than his mind had ever before imagined.

One of the girls was reading a book on a rustic seat, the other sitting beside her was knitting ; both were quite silent.

The reader, as her face bent slightly over the book, called up to Rupert's mind his boyish dreams of Paradise. The rounded profile ; the deep-blue thoughtful eye, over which the eye-lashes drooped, shading somewhat their softened brightness ; the white forehead, over which the dark hair was plainly but neatly braided ; and the exquisite, indefinable beauty that harmonised each into one beautiful whole was such as no pen can describe.

It was not so much that any one feature was beautiful ; it was the striking and singular grace and the unnameable beauty that gathered over all together, that made her appearance so handsome—so unusually prepossessing. Rupert had often seen girls with eyes as blue, with foreheads as fair, with faces whose rounded contour was perfect as hers ; but the air, the appearance, that singular charm or expression reigning over all and combining them together, he had never before seen. For a minute or two he stood silently looking on, no movement interrupting the repose of the scene, his eyes and his soul drinking in the fatal draught of beauty, and with it that of intoxicating love.

Beside the reader was another girl, very attractive too, but of a much less pensive character, whose pleasant face, as she knitted, seemed to be quite familiar to him. Whatever her thoughts were fixed on, as her fingers moved rapidly at her work, seemed to be of a pleasant character, for her eye occasionally lighted up with a droll smile, and her lip moved as if she were silently passing some repartee.

Suddenly she raised her head smilingly, as if in salutation to some imaginary acquaintance whose form was just then

filling her mind, when her eyes happened to fall on the gate, thence on the hand that was silently laid on the top rail, and finally on the owner thereof. The motion of the eyes was so rapid from the time she lifted her head until her gaze fell on Rupert's face that she had hardly time to think, and accordingly, failing to collect her thoughts, her first attempt at action was a slight scream.

"Norah !"

"Yes !" said the reader, lifting her head from the book.

"Look—who's that ?"

"Where ?"

"At the gate—at the orchard gate !"

The bright eyes, that had raised themselves at the question, full of thought and reflection, now startled into activity and life by the hurried undertone of the other, flashed their brightness in the direction indicated ; and, turning them on the gate, they rested on a young man somewhat over middle size—rather approaching tallness, firmly but lithely built, and upon whose face the moustache, already beginning to grow dark and heavy, alone indicated manhood. A foraging cap upon his head gave him rather an outre look ; but there was no mistaking the frank manliness of his face, nor the genuine look of courage and good-humour that shone in his eyes. And an arm in slings gave him an air of interest.

The lifting of the faces of the young girls towards him disturbed his reverie, in which for a minute or two he had rested, and he hastened to open the gate. It easily swung aside, and almost in a second, before they had time to stand up from their seats, he had passed into the garden.

"I hope I have not disturbed you, ladies. I wandered here by accident. I am looking for a friend of mine, Joe

the coachman. I was directed to come this way to find him—and I came it.”

This much, Rupert with great hesitation and brokenly. He would have had vastly less difficulty in rising on the spur of the moment to address a court-martial that had pronounced his death sentence than in saying even so much.

“This is Mr. Clarendon,” whispered the knitter, as she took in the whole position at a glance.

“Yes, I am,” said Rupert, hearing the whisper, and seizing on it as a lucky chance, whereby to introduce himself. “I am Rupert Clarendon, ladies. I was on the coach with Joe at the time of the runaway ; and, with him, got hurt. I learn he is anxious to see me ; and so, too, I am anxious to see him.”

“Joe, Mr. Clarendon, is in the house—if you will do us the favour to walk inside. Or, perhaps you would prefer we should send him out to you ?” Thus Maury.

“Oh, not at all,” said Rupert, courteously and hurriedly ; “I shall go in to see him. Many thanks.”

“Then I shall show you the way in, Mr. Clarendon. And keep you from the dogs. We keep very wicked dogs here to protect us, Mr. Clarendon.”

Mr. Clarendon, as he looked at the bright smiling face that said this, thought that she would have been perfectly right in keeping a seven-headed dragon, much less a dog, to protect her—to protect the both—and would have said so, but that he feared how it might be taken.

The wicked dogs, as they entered the barn from the garden, bounded forward, but a word from the rosier of the two girls drove them back. Strong, active, fierce, sharp-fanged animals they seemed to be ; and as they steadied themselves

more firmly on their hind legs, and uncovered their teeth, Rupert could not help fancying they would have been formidable foes to encounter had he come alone ; or had he failed to meet his present gentle, but in this case powerful, escort.

"Down, Marmaduke ! down, sir ! Down, Sir Hardinge !" said the young girl, as she placed her white hand on the rough shaggy forehead of the dog, and pulled lightly his ears—whereat the dog, in huge gambols, lifted his fore feet on her dress, and mouthed her hand as if going to eat it.

"It would not have been a very large mouthful either," Rupert thought, as he watched these caresses on her part and these antics on the part of the animals.

"We call these Marmaduke and Sir Hardinge, in honour of our landlords," said the young girl in explanation, as she led the way into the bawn.

"Ay, an' very good names too ! Divil a better—as you'd say if you saw 'em sometimes," said a voice from inside the bawn gate, which Rupert promptly recognised even before he saw the speaker.

"Why, Joe, did you come out ?" said the young girl in great glee.

"Hallo, Joe !" broke in Rupert, as he saw the figure he was in quest of sitting on a small wooden form by the side of the whitewashed sunny wall, busily engaged in mending fishing tackle, "Hallo, Joe !"

"Mr. Rupert Clarendon," said Joe, with some surprise, even though he had anticipated a visit from him.

"Yes, Joe. I thought I'd come to see you, and how you were doing—How are you doing ? We have had a memorable race together," said he, turning to the ladies.

"So I heard," said the paler of the two.

"You were going quiet enough when I saw you," said the other.

"It ought to have been good luck to meet you," said Joe, addressing the girl who spoke, as he laid aside his assemblage of hooks and flies, and stood up to face the three, who were standing in front of him talking down to him; "but you see it wasn't. It's generally lucky to pass a girl beetlin' clothes."

A new light flashed upon Rupert's mind as he remembered the meeting with the young girl that was standing on the stepping-stones of the little stream busily engaged beetling on the day of the accident, and with whom the coachman had had such a long conversation. Her features with this reminder flew back in quick recollection to his memory. Save the momentary embarrassment then of being found in dishabille, and the ruddy flush of action and exercise on her face, they were the same.

"Well, you can't say yet that it wasn't lucky, Joe," said Maury with a quiet laugh. "You're not much the worse for it, nor is this young gentleman much the worse for it. And you—you've had plenty of time to repent of your sins, and prepare for the next world."

"I have time enough to do that," said Joe gravely. "A young fellow like me, of twenty-three—'tisn't thinking of the next world he ought to be."

As Joe was entering within half a dozen years of sixty, this evoked a hearty laugh from the two girls, in which Rupert himself could not help joining.

"Seventy-five, Joe," said Maury, when the laugh had ended. "Seventy-five; not a day less. And a fine round age it is, too—glory be to God, for having reached it!"

"I'd like to see," said Joe, with the same gravity, "the young fellow of twenty-five who could touch me at anything, only for the stiffness in this leg and this arm." He nodded with his head to the one and the other, which were still cased in splints.

"Is it in making love you spend your convalescence?" said Rupert, joining into the humour of the occasion, and prompted to say so by a consciousness that Joe had the best of the business.

"Aye, indeed, Mr. Clarendon; I'd have liked to follow suit wid yourself. How do you like Grangemore Castle and all the people in it?" added he with malicious drollery.

"Very well, indeed, Joe," said Rupert, not catching the intent that lay under the question. "I find them very kind and very attentive and considerate, and I have grown to like them very much."

Another unexpressed thought ran through his head, which was to the effect, "I wish I had been carried here instead"; but he did not say so.

"So we've heard," said Maury, who was readiest to lead the conversation. "So we've heard. Haven't we, Joe?"

"Yes, we have," said Joe. "Mr. Clarendon did not give up his time to thinking ov the next world, no more nor meself."

"No; he did not," said Maury.

"Why would we? Young fellows," said Joe, "like us can very well afford to do that in fifty or sixty years' time."

"Oh, you might give yourself a little more time, Joe. Put on another ten years or so for yourself," said Maury.

"No," said Joe chivalrously. "I never want to be better nor my friends."

"That's good ov' you, Joe. But you were always so good," quoth Maury.

"Yes, that's so ; an' I'll be better after a bit. When Mr. Clarendon gets the estates, I'm bound to be either coachman or steward to him or maybe both, with a touch of the bailiff along wid id—an' then see what I'll do."

"You'll give me Glenholen—won't you, Joe?"

"Yes, I will."

"And plant a large orchard for me, Joe?"

"Yes, certainly," said Joe with splendid generosity.

"And you'll put Norah back in Carrigbrae?"

"No, I won't," said Joe promptly.

"Oh, Joe!" said the second young girl, in gentle, good-humoured remonstrance. "Oh, Joe."

"Divil a bit, Miss Norah," said Joe steadfastly.

"Oh, Joe! Why?"

"Because I couldn't," said Joe emphatically. "Because I couldn't. The greatest saint that ever worked miracles couldn't bring back Carrigbrae as it was."

"But one as good Joe," said Maury, in further appeal. "One as good would do as well, Joe, you know."

"No, Maury, it wouldn't. A miracle could not restore it to me as I knew and saw it. Nor a miracle wouldn't blot out what has happened. I can't do that," said Joe, with a feeling, however, that his earnestness was breaking in abruptly on the pleasant nature of their chat, and was out of place, and therefore instantly resolving to change it. "But if I don't do that, I'll do a grate dale of other good things when I am coachman an' bailiff, and Mr. Clarendon comes in for the estates."

"The estates," said Rupert, hearing the word mentioned,

and wholly ignorant of the nature and intent of the conversation that was being carried on at his expense, but knowing readily enough it was pleasant raillery of some sort. "The estates. What estates?"

His thoughts went back to Devonshire, and of a sudden his heart jumped up to his mouth. Could some misfortune have happened his father, of which the knowledge, known to all others, had been kept from him? This notion seized him intently for a second; and in a strain of alarm that evoked mirth, light and pleasant as the streaming sunshine, from the two girls, asked again:—

"The estates. What estates?"

"Why, becoorse," said Joe breaking in on the silvery merriment of the girls. "Marmaduke can't live long; so he can't. He's dying as it is, or as good as dying. An' who's to fall in for the estates then?"

"Then. When?" asked Rupert, but little informed by this singular explanation.

"Why, becoorse, when the son dies there'll be no wan for 'em but Miss Lucy. Sir Hardinge can't live always himself aither."

"Oh, I see!" said Rupert, as the light broke in upon him with some embarrassment. "That's it—is it?"

"Yes," said Joe, who quietly enjoyed his confusion, "it wasn't for nothin' the horses runned away."

"Upon my word," said Rupert seriously, "there's not the slightest ground for all this. None."

As far as he could judge of his own mind at that present moment there was not; but he had forgotten the very different ideas that filled his mind an hour before. In presence of the surpassing loveliness of the girl beside

him, the warm thoughts of the earlier hours seemed but the merest passing fancies.

"No, av coorse not," said Joe; "but for all that, remember it was I that introduced you to the estates and to the heiress; and will certainly expect you to give Miss Norah Moore——. Did I tell you this young lady was Norah Moore?"

"No," said Rupert, rather uncomfortably at this strange form of introduction. "No."

"Norah Moore, that I told you about on the coach, that lived in Carrigbrae. You remember? yes, you do!"

"Yes, I remember," said Rupert, who had a perfectly clear recollection of whom she was as soon as her name was brought before him; and who devoutly wished that this roundabout form of introduction was ended and over.

"Well, that is Norah Moore—Miss Norah Moore—beside you! I believe the reason they turned her out of the country was, bekaise if she stopped much longer in it she'd set them all frantic mad."

"Oh, Joe!" said Norah with a slight scream.

"I am glad to be introduced to you, Miss Moore," said Rupert, lifting his hat, "though Joe's introduction comes a little late. I had introduced myself earlier, Joe."

"An' there's another lady," said Joe, nodding his head towards Maury. "There's another lady that's goin' to play the same pranks. She's goin' to set the country afire, too! *she* is."

"Hold your tongue, you old cripple!" said Maury, in mock anger, as she gave him a soft box on the head, and snatched up his book of fishing tackle from the seat beside him.

"Oh, don't, Miss Maury. Don't!" cried Joe. "Don't! I'll want that for fishin' in the sthrame by-and-bye. Give it back to me."

"Certainly, Joe! you must get it back," said Norah, and a friendly struggle ensued, the result of which was that the pocket-book was taken from Maury's yielding hands, and re-transferred to the ownership of Joe again.

As soon as he had finished his work, tied on the flies, and fixed the rod, he and his companion after some further conversation went down through the meadow lands that led from the house to the river, to fish. A goodly little stream it was for trout; for leading to the Shannon, and unhindered and unimpeded by mill-race or obstacle, the fish had plenty of means of coming up, and abiding in its occasionally deep pools, which they did. And many a time before, Billy's skilled line had raised the quivering trout from out its dark waters, and left them jumping on the grass of the meadow banks.

It was an afternoon of quiet enjoyment and delight, as they wandered or stood along the banks of the stream, as occasion or the exigencies of the fishing might need; Joe plying the rod, and letting the line fall softly on the surface of the stream with dexterous cast, whilst Rupert, smoking quietly and dreamily, watched the result of his efforts.

These were attended by no inconsiderable success, and after the lapse of a couple of hours, the basket which Joe carried on his arm was pretty well filled with fish, whose scales sparkled with tints of silver and gold.

"Joe," said Rupert, when the basket was nigh filled.

"Yes," said Joe, throwing deftly his line over a quiet pool, where he conjectured a trout might be hiding.

"I'm getting tired. I think we ought to rest."

"So am I," said Joe; "I am gettin' very tired too."

"Well, suppose we rest here?"

"Yes, I think we have gone far enough. I promised Miss Norah to get back early for tea; you're to come with me."

"Am I? I wasn't asked."

"Well, I ask you—that is, if you have no objection. And if you have an objection to that, maybe you'd have no objection to this," producing a flask from his pocket.

"I have not any objection to either, Joe—none. Quite the contrary. Here's your health."

"Good health," said Joe. "If you want to mix water with it you have not far to go; there's the stream at your feet, good as ever bubbled out of a rock. And now I'll take a smoke. Norah will expect us back."

"About Norah," said Rupert.

"Yes," said Joe.

"Wasn't that the girl you told me about who lived in the ruined house, that day on the coach?"

"The same," said Joe.

"She is a handsome girl; a very handsome girl."

"I told you so that day, if you remember, when we were on the coach."

"Yes, but I couldn't conceive from your words anything so striking. I thought you said she went to France."

"So she did."

"And came back?"

"Yes. And came back. Came back to see her mother's grave. Her mother died while she was away."

"Is she long back?"

"Only a few days. And it's more or less a secret still."

Because if it was known she was stopping at any house—at Maury's now for instance—Maury would soon be on the shaughraun as well as herself."

"You mean she would be dispossessed?"

"I do."

"It's an odd country when such a girl," said Rupert, "can be hunted from house to house like that, and denied shelter. In any other country her name would be something historical—her fame would be wide as the country itself."

"That's how it is here," said Joe, throwing his eye over the pool he had lately "whipped," a large trout rising having attracted his attention. "That's how it is here, now; that's how it was afore; and that's how 'twill be for ever, I think. Sorra haporth ever I see likely to stop it."

"And her brother—what's this you told me about her brother?" asked Rupert.

"He was thransported."

"Oh, I remember, yes. What sort was he?"

"About a year older. And what sort? About as tall as you are. Stronger made, I think; an' that would think as little of crossing that sthrame in a flying leap, as I would in jumping across the trout basket."

"And he was transported?"

"Yes, for nothin' too."

"It's curious law, and a curious world."

"Aye, an' they wor athin an aim's ace ov hangin' him. The ould Judge, wud wan leg in the grave, an' the other on the brink ov it, wud as soon put on the black cap an' hang him as thransport him. An' he wud only for an accident."

"An accident!"

"Well, you may call it an accident. You see he was afther thransportin' five or six young fellows for bein' out afther ten o'clock at night."

"After ten o'clock at night," said Rupert, glancing at his companion to see if he were in earnest. "Surely you can't mean that! There has been no such law as that in England for the last eight hundred years!"

"Well, it's here, whether it is in England or not. An' so bein' an ould stupid man, when he kem to Kevin, he forgot that he was found guilty of a different thing, and so sintenced him to thransportation, or otherwise he might, and most likely would, have hung him."

"And he was transported?"

"Faix, I suppose he's at the other side ov the world, in Botany Bay, by this. It takes about six months to go there. It would be as well for him they hung him, for sorra bit of his name or face will ever be seen or heard of in Ireland or Westmeath again. He might as well be sent to work in the mines of Siberia."

"It's a great affliction for such a young girl. Pity such trouble should come on the head of one so surprisingly handsome."

"Pity it should come on any wan," said Joe carelessly. "I'd ketch that trout, but I'm afeard we'd be late back. I think we'd better be movin'."

"All right. I am at your service at any moment."

Rupert was at his service at any moment for the return journey. It seemed to him like travelling a portion of the road to Paradise, to be going towards the Orchard Farm-house. Whatever dreams or ideas of Lucy Hargrave had

been in his head setting out in the morning had all been long since banished out of it.

This Rupert remembered as he travelled homewards at the side of his companion over the soft grass, and smiled a self-deprecating smile as he felt how transient the impression was.

And by the time the afternoon had been spent at the farmhouse ; by the time they had all wandered down the meadows to the whimpling stream, and back again into the orchard ; and by the time the girls had parted him at the orchard gate, after his promising to come and see Joe to-morrow again, Rupert was as hopelessly in love as ever mortal was after such a short acquaintance.

It was surprising to himself even, to find how swiftly his thoughts had changed in respect of his further stay at the castle. Whilst in the morning he was blessing his stars that Colonel Montfort had delayed so long away, and so gave him further duration to stay thereat, now his chief anxiety was to get away as speedily as might be. There was something exceedingly irksome in the idea of going back there at all. The courteous civilities and kindnesses shown him grated on his feelings, and the walks and conversations with Miss Hargrave seemed dull and monotonous in the highest degree.

And it now occurred to him for the first time that it was strange, and very wrong, that he should continue remaining in the house, and partaking of the hospitalities of one at whose hands his uncle had met his death—and if these hints and insinuations were true, by means in which foul play had something to do. It did not occur to him to question himself why these thoughts had not before cropped up in his

mind. It only remained for him, now that they did, to assent to their force. It was all very well, whilst he was incapable of being removed, to so remain ; but it was, he felt, and ought to be, out of the question longer. He, therefore, mentally resolved that to-morrow, after coming back from Orchard Cottage, he should take his farewell, and leave for the barracks in Athlone.

The only objection that arose to that intention was the hindrance it would be to his visits to the Orchard, to which he had begun to look forward with great delight. But, on the other hand, he thought he might have better opportunities at the barracks. The state of his health would warrant him in being off duty for some time, and would further furnish him with sufficient excuse for riding out daily, and whither could he have so delightful a ride ?

These things being settled in his mind to his satisfaction, he walked more briskly homewards.

The exercise being more than he was of late accustomed to, he felt tired, and taking shelter from the hot sun of the evening, he stretched himself for a refreshing smoke under the shade of a clump of furze that grew by the stream.

He was resting himself in a dreamy, sensuous way watching the smoke slowly curl up reflecting in the water, and thinking of the bright eyes and beautiful face that he had seen that day : and conjuring up its beauty in the blue skies above him flecked with red and white clouds, and in the dancing surface of the stream.

“ I say I will ! I say I will ! and no man shall stop me ! ”

These words, uttered in a voice of suppressed passion, fell on his ear. There was every indication in the hissing and

hoarse undertone in which the words were said that the purpose and intention of the threat was a malignant one.

Rupert, withdrawing his cigar from his mouth, listened. There was no word spoken for some time ; but then a girl's voice, apparently remonstrating, fell on his ear.

"Why did he say he wouldn't give it to you ?"

"He's giving the whole townland to Donald McVey, the grazier, and breaking his word with me. He promised me that farm, an' it'll be worse for him if he does not keep his word. 'Twas I that got the ground cleared for him. I swore against Kevin Moore and thransported him, when they were afraid of his being left in the counthry, 'Twas I made up the story about the secret meeting."

"And why didn't you tell him all this ?"

"And didn't I tell him ?"

"What did he say ?"

"He said I did it for my own benefit, that he couldn't give the farm, and that I'd be thransported for false swearing if I said a word about it. Aye, and tould me if I didn't like to wait his convenience, I might go back to Scotland."

"Go back to Scotland ?"

"Aye, nice treatment, to send me back, and such a fine farm all as good as in my hands. I was certain sure this many a day it was mine. Didn't I work for it, and didn't he promise it to me ?"

"You ought to see him again. He won't refuse."

"If he does he'll be sorry for it. I'll see him again to-night. I'll have it out with him. I'll tell him something will surprise him, and if it goes to that, I'll leave him that he'll not have a spot in Grangemore to sleep in. Let him hang as many of his tenants as he likes for it. I will !

"I will!" he said fiercely, in wrathful asseveration, as his companion remonstrated with him in low tones. "I will! May the —— fly away with me if I don't!"

The voices ceased as the parties withdrew further on, and Rupert, attracted and interested by the mysterious threats, rose to pursue his way and to look after them.

The speakers were a man and a woman, the former of whom he had often seen around the castle grounds. Without taking any particular notice of him at the time, he still recognised him by his dress and by his walk. The latter, in a great degree, resembled that of Marmaduke, and it was that circumstance particularly that attracted his attention at first. It occurred to him at the time as being the most successful attempt, sometimes made by flunkeys, of modelling themselves on and imitating their superiors in gait and manner, he had ever seen.

But the threats and their utterer alike died out of his head before he got home. He was too much occupied in thinking how best to avoid, without being ill-bred, coming in contact with the family for the evening. He could not overcome the irksome sense that fastened itself on him when he thought of meeting them. He was too indolent to try to find out what hidden spring had so recently given prominence to this feeling. He was content to know that it was so, and energetic enough only to gratify the feeling.

Accordingly finding, luckily, no one in the drawing-room when he entered, he left word with the butler that he was indisposed, had a severe headache, was exhausted after his walk, and would retire to his bedroom for the evening. Which latter he did.

The evening was hot, and he felt really tired, the walk

being far in excess of any he had taken since his illness Wherefore he threw open both sashes of the window, that looked down on the garden, for air, took up a book to read, and, throwing himself with his coat off on the bed, was soon asleep.

He was awoke from his sleep, after some time, by the noise of voices in the garden in altercation underneath.

"I tell you I can't. I told you so before."

The words were in Sir Hardinge's voice, and were angry, stormy.

"But you promised it to me before," said the voice in tones which seemed to be one asking for a favour of a very decided character.

"Well, I've altered my mind. I must suit my words to my circumstances."

"Do you mean to say you've given it away?"

"Yes. But I shall not be catechised by you as to what I do or do not with my tenants."

"You did not say that when you encouraged me to swear against young Moore."

"See!" said Sir Hardinge with a sensible lowering of his voice, "you put that first into my head. You told me stories of his threats towards me which I afterwards judged to be untrue. You did all for your own purpose and your own ends. It can't be undone now. Not even though you told your own perjury, and got yourself transported. But I am not bound by your work, and shall not be. I shall do as I think best with my land. You have no claim on me or it. The present tenants make such claims, and no one advised me against them stronger than you."

"Haven't I a claim?" said the other in a voice in which

rage, hate, and despair seemed to be equally mixed. "Haven't I a claim?"

"You a claim!" said Sir Hardinge. "If you don't get out of my presence without saying another word, I'll lay the weight of my horse-whip on your shoulder."

"Will you? I dare you! A claim! Aye have I a claim."

"Let us hear it. Just for one second, before I let loose your Scotch blood and your Scotch impudence. I've too long permitted so many of you to be around me."

"Do! I've as good a right to be here as your son. Remember that! How? I'll tell you. You brought it on yourself. Remember that, too!"

"Go on!" said Sir Hardinge. "What claim?"

"A good claim! Because Lady Hargrave is as near a relation of mine as she is of ——"

The announcement was not received in the manner it was expected it would.

For there fell on Rupert's ears the next moment the swish as of some weapon swiftly flying through the air, and as Sir Hardinge's voice burst forth in angry tones:—

"Liar, dog! Is this the reward of my kindness? Are loathsome hounds like you the creatures I've brought around me?"

There came also the thud, repeated several times, of blows falling in rapid succession on a soft surface.

Jumping from his place of repose, Rupert looked out and saw the steward reeling under the blows of the whip-handle that, delivered with vigorous and powerful effort, and as fast as it was possible for a strong and active man to deliver them, were rained upon his face and head and temple. He reeled unsteadily for a second or two, but a final cut from

the whip of Sir Hardinge across his temples tumbled him ; and he lay on the ground, his face marked with blows, and covered with blood.

If it had held any longer Rupert might have been tempted to interfere in the unequal struggle, but as the steward fell Sir Hardinge flung the whip at the senseless form, and, exclaiming :—"There, you ruffian ! take that instead of land !" walked away.

"He deserves it all, and more," thought Rupert, as he lay back again softly on the bed, and so as not to be seen at the window. "He deserves thrice as much. He's a most prodigious ruffian. Though it was certainly hardly right or manly of Sir Hardinge to send a young fellow to penal servitude without cause, and brand him with the disgrace of a convict's badge. It's a droll country, and—curiously governed."

He lay back thinking.

"That bears out what Joe said. 'For nothin',' these were his words. I don't think I ought to suffer this gross wrong to continue. I have got—in an uncomfortable way to be sure—the material now—if they would only say in public what they say in private—to redress it. Is it my business, though ? And Norah ! so sweet, so handsome, so gentle, so graceful ! more like an angel than a girl !

"Very curious how all this has come round ! I must try and get away out of this with as little delay as possible. Other unpleasantnesses may creep up if I don't. Here goes !—to see Norah again to-morrow, anyhow ! If I could only tell her the secret I have, I could make her bright eyes brighter, and her pleasant smile pleasanter still. London society ! Pooh !" said he aloud after some additional

thinking, rising up to get a cigar. "Pooh, where have they ever in their salons or drawing-rooms anything like her! By heavens! she is fit to be a queen where all are beautiful. There!"

He was apparently reasoning with some imaginary remonstrant, and threw off this bold statement defiantly.

CHAPTER XIX.

IN FREEDOM.

WHEN the three shipwrecked men were brought into the little bathing-place on the Garronese coast, it was found that Convict No. 37, or, as we should rather call him, Phelim, was seriously ill. His worn frame, exhausted after ten years of prison life and mental suffering, was unable to stand the dreadful hardship of that night of storm, and he was soon found to be suffering from a severe attack of brain fever.

Fortunately the captain had sufficient money with him to ensure the two friends a comfortable home, and all the necessary medical and other comforts; and when he saw them safely and carefully located, he took his departure for the nearest station, which was many miles distant, and thence to London, to report the loss of his vessel to the owners.

The attention and kindness which his companion had bestowed upon himself Kevin now had the opportunity of returning.

For days and weeks the sufferer lay unconscious, during

which his companion attended to him unceasingly. At last, owing to his care and the kindness of the French doctor who attended him, he had the gratification of seeing him on the way to recovery. It was a long time before he was able to rise from his bed, still longer before he could walk about. But when he did, the little strolls by the seaside, and the balmy and invigorating air of the southern French coast rapidly made him strong.

Evening after evening they walked along the little beach, over which the treacherous sea rolled in tiny, sunny wavelets, with ripples slight and soft, as if it had never tossed a helpless ship about, or engulfed it in its depths—as if it had never washed the light out of man's eyes, or quenched the fire of life in his heart.

"Phelim," said Kevin one evening, when the former was able to walk without the support of his friend's arm, "we are a long time here."

"So we are," said Phelim, acquiescingly.

"Don't you think we might soon make an effort to travel?"

"Yes, I think we might."

"Are you strong enough for a long journey?"

"I think I am. Where do you think we should go?"

"Where would you like to go?"

"To Ireland—to Clare."

"Just what I was thinking myself," said Kevin. "But there is danger, you know."

"So there is," said Phelim.

"But, danger or not," said Kevin, "I must go. I cannot help going. There are friends there whom I would like to see—in fact, that no dread of danger would keep me from seeing."

"Likely enough," said Phelim. "Why not?"

"But you have no friends in Clare. You told me so."

"Not one."

"Then why, my dear fellow, should you put yourself in the way of danger? If you are found out you will spend the remainder of your life in prison."

"So I would. That's true."

"Then why go there? Remember your ten years. Why should you put yourself in danger again? I have friends in this country—in Paris—with whom you can stay."

"Kevin Moore!" said the other, after a pause, "you have friends in Ireland you would like to see—to see, no matter what danger you passed through."

"Yes; I certainly have."

"Well, there is no friend there whose sight would be half as pleasant to you as the sight of my wife's—of Mary—and her baby's grave would be to me!"

"Ah!"

"No! not one! I have been dreaming of them night after night since I began to grow well. Maybe it's the freedom, maybe it's the brightness of these skies that makes me think of them, but night after night I think of them—dream of them—as they used to be ten long years ago, eleven years nearly now, when the sun shone over our cottage, and danced, as it does now here, on the sea before our door!"

"Poor fellow!" thought Kevin. "And so you will go to Clare, Phelim?"

"Yes; I'll go to Clare. I can't rest until I see their graves—until I pray over where they've been sleeping these ten years."

"Very well, Phelim. Let it be so. We will go together."

But tell me, Phelim"—he asked the question in a half-whisper, so much was the dread upon himself—"does *he* ever come now?"

Phelim glanced up and around with something of his old look, but it quickly vanished as he said :

"No."

"Thank God for that!" said Kevin.

"Amen! Glory be to His holy name!"

A few days after they left for Paris. The generous captain had not only left sufficient means to carry them over the period of illness, but enough to defray their expenses to Paris.

Arrived at his uncle's house, Kevin for the first time learned of the break-up of his home in Ireland, of the dispossession of his mother and sister. Further, learned to his surprise that Norah had been nearly all the time since living with his uncle, the Abbe, until a few days previously, on hearing of her mother's illness, she had hurried back to attend her.

All this only made him the more anxious to get back. He felt upon wires until he should see her again, and until he should see the fair face of Maury O'Keeffe.

The Abbe was too glad, however, to see his nephew, whom he had not seen since he was a little child on a former visit to Paris, to permit himself or friend to leave for a few days. It was with considerable reluctance he consented to his returning at all, but Kevin was too steadfast in his intention, and the Abbe gave way.

Making use of their new-found liberty, and the delightful sense of unconstraint that accompanied it, he and his friend rambled through the streets of Paris during their few days of stay.

The magnificence of the buildings ; the splendour of the streets ; the surpassing richness and beauty of the shops ; the long boulevards crowded with beauty and fashion ; had unceasing charms for them. Their eyes had been so long accustomed to the whitewashed walls of the cell, or the bare bleak surroundings of the prison yard, that the sight seemed to them a glimpse of Paradise.

But it was in the night time, when its long lines of lamps, lighting up its streets with a brilliancy that they had never seen before, and when the crowds, moving and shifting apast with the ever-changing forms of a kaleidoscope, gave the streets such a panoramic effect, that they loved to stroll leisurely through the boulevards and thoroughfares.

It was on the fifth or sixth night after their arrival that Kevin and his friend were walking leisurely about. They had branched off, without intending it, from the great thoroughfares, and found themselves in one of those narrow and gloomy streets that, before the days of the third Napoleon and Baron Haussman, formed such quaint and old-fashioned scenes in the daytime, but became at night such dangerous places for unwary travellers.

"We have lost our way, Phelim, I fear," said Kevin.

"So I think," said Phelim. "We have not been here before, that I can remember."

"No, we have not," said Kevin, as he glanced up at the high gloomy houses, and up and down the lightless street. "But I think this leads to the river. If we got to the quays I think I should know my way."

"Let us go on then. We must go on anyhow, for we cannot remain here all night."

They proceeded down the narrow street. Occasionally a

figure, lurking in the darkened doorways, startled them by suddenly protruding its head, and at other times the loud noise of uproar in some of the gloomy and dilapidated houses warned them that they were in dangerous quarters.

"Which way shall we turn, I wonder," said Kevin, as they reached the corner of the street that seemed to debouch into ways still narrower and more lightless. "This does not seem a promising look-out."

"No," said Phelim, "I think we had better go back. This does not look like the way to the quays."

"No; I don't think it does. We must go back—but hush!"

The noise of uproar and clamour burst on them from a few doors away. It came with singular suddenness, and in a moment further a voice cried out—

"Help! murder! Help! help! Murder!"

"God bless us!" said Kevin. "What is that? That's a stranger that's being murdered—an Irishman, too. Listen!"

No further sounds grew on the night air, but some distance down the gloomy street they could see with distinctness some forms moving and tussling about—evidently quarrelling.

"There's some bad work going on there," said Kevin hurriedly. "I won't look on, Phelim, and see murder done—not even here. Stay here a moment! Phelim, while I run down and see what's amiss!"

"No," said Phelim, with equal excitement; "I'll go with you."

"Come, then, Phelim; and come quickly!"

Running at the top of his speed, and followed by his companion, Kevin flew in the direction where the tussling was going on.

A few men—three or four—were engaged around a form that lay apparently senseless at their feet. They had paid no attention to the footsteps of the two men as they approached, possibly mistaking them for friends and accomplices ; and it was only when Kevin burst in on them with “Murderers and robbers, what do you here?” that they found out their mistake.

Kevin’s skill in athletics on the bog of Mullawnmore stood him in good stead here, for catching one of them by the shoulder with a swing and a sudden trip he flung him heavily against the railings, whilst, as another tried to run past him, with a dexterous movement of his foot he flung him heavily on his face on the kerbstone.

The others, with the cowardice peculiar to robbers, fled.

“He is dead, poor fellow !” said Kevin, as he bent over the senseless victim. “They have killed him.”

“Murder, robbers, police !” he shouted at the top of his voice, forgetting in his excitement that he was in a strange city where his words could not be understood. Finally he placed his fingers in his lips, and blew a whistle so shrill that it made the night birds startle from the eaves of the high houses, and rang with weird and strange effect in the narrow and silent street.

It was answered by another whistle afar off, and whilst they looked and listened lights were seen at the farther end of the street rapidly advancing ; the military tread of men rang on the pavement ; and in a few seconds a night patrol of gendarmes was beside them.

“There has been murder here,” said Kevin as they came beside.

“So I see—or something like it,” said the chief of the

patrol, answering him in excellent English. "You are foreigners—English I see. How did it happen?"

Kevin rapidly explained to him the circumstances.

"Jacque's gang!" said the gendarme. "You came in good time. Quarter of an hour more, and the river would have had his body. His friends might search the Morgue for him to-morrow. He is not dead, however. His heart beats," he said, as he took the lantern from one of the men and stooped down. "They were disturbed a little too soon."

"Is he badly hurt?" asked Kevin.

"I cannot say. They usually do this business more effectually. But he has been robbed. There is nothing in his pockets. See here."

He took from the ground, where it lay beside him, a fragment of gold chain.

"He must have struggled pretty well with them. They do not usually give time for even that. Here, men, carry him to the nearest wine shop."

In a few seconds the men unfolded, to Kevin's surprise, a rope stretcher, which they usually carried with them, and by an ingenious contrivance, with their batons, soon made it sufficiently strong to bear the stranger on. Lifting the prostrate form they bore him along to a corner shop, through whose half-closed door the lights gleamed in pleasant and striking contrast with the gloom of the street.

His period of unconsciousness was short, for as they bore him into the little parlour, and poured a drop of brandy between his lips, he feebly asked, "Where am I?"

"Among friends at present," said the chief.

"What has happened me?"

"Rest yourself for the present. You will learn all a little later on."

"I have been assaulted, I think."

"Yes ; and you may thank your countryman here for your life."

Kevin glanced at Phelim with the most intense surprise ; and as he did he saw that the same expression of wonderment was in his companion's eyes that he knew to be in his own.

"It is most extraordinary," he said in a whisper.

"It is," assented Phelim.

"I never saw anything so surprising."

"Nor I."

"Was there ever such a wonderful meeting ?"

"I think not."

Whilst they were thus whispering in short and broken sentences, the garotted man roused himself sufficiently to glance at the faces that surrounded him. His eyes passed lightly over those of the gendarmerie ; but as he glanced at the two that accompanied them, a curious expression passed also into his face. He withdrew his eyes for a moment, rubbed them with his extended fingers, and again bestowed a further look of a very inquiring character upon them.

"Do my eyes deceive me ? "Am I," said he—sitting upright in his astonishment—"dreaming or swooning still ?"

"You are not swooning or dreaming, doctor ; you are quite wide awake," said Kevin pleasantly.

"It is not possible——"

"It is quite possible," said Kevin, again breaking in on the conversation, to prevent any revealments that might

bring them into unnecessary trouble or surveillance from the gendarmerie. "We are the same two you formerly knew in Portsmouth."

The doctor closed his eyes in utter surprise and bewilderment, then opening them, asked—

"How did you come here?"

"We shall tell you when you are able to come away with us."

In less than an hour, and with the assistance of some good old brandy provided by madame the innkeeper, he was able to leave; and the gendarmerie, politely seeing them safe out of the dangerous quarters into the crowded and lighted thoroughfares, bade them good night, or rather good morning.

On their way home they stated in full and without any reservation the story of their escape, all of which their former medical attendant listened to with the most attentive interest.

"It is an extremely curious business," he said finally; "and a remarkably fortunate thing for me that it occurred, else I should likely enough be found in the Morgue to-morrow."

"They had time enough to rob you, though," said Kevin.

"Yes," said he, as he searched his pockets; "they have not left me a farthing. Rather an awkward thing in Paris, of all other cities."

"If you will come with me," said Kevin, "I may be able to remove that awkwardness."

The doctor did not hesitate a second to accompany them to the Abbe's, where he formed a very welcome addition to their party, and from whom he received a loan of

sufficient amount to defray his expenses in Paris and his journey to England, whence he could pay the obligation.

“Good-bye,” said he, as he parted with his two friends at the Calais station. “Keep clear of Portsmouth for the future.”

“We are not likely to see you there again,” said Kevin in high good humour.

“No, you are not ; for a different reason, however, from what you fancy. I am leaving there. I have been attached to one of the regiments—stationed, I believe, indeed, somewhere in Ireland. Good-bye.”

“Good-bye—good-bye,” cried the two former convicts as their good-natured friend moved off in the parting train.

A few days afterwards both took their leave of Paris, and arrived in London. Thence Phelim took his journey to Bristol to catch the boat to Limerick, whence he could proceed to Clare ; whilst Kevin started without delay to Dublin and thence to Westmeath.

CHAPTER XX.

A SUMMER NIGHT AT ORCHARD COTTAGE.

THE dusk had fallen by imperceptible degrees, until, to the softened glory of an August evening the thick darkness of night succeeded.

The harvest-clad sides of Carrigbrae were shrouded in gloom ; the orchard trees raised themselves like guarding sentinels, barely seen through the darkness ; and, save the cornrake in the fields or the murmuring ripple of the

streamlet through the meadow, there was no sound to disturb the silence of the night.

Withinside the Orchard House the lights had been long lit, and were still burning—a very unusual thing, for, in the harvest time particularly, early to bed and early to rise was the custom. The workers, who, to avail themselves of the summer hours, were up and at work as soon as day dawned, must perforce, if they were to preserve their strength, retire to bed with the waning daylight.

On this particular evening, however, the lights were burning late, but the time at last came when it was necessary they should prepare to retire.

"We may as well say the Rosary now," said Mrs. O'Keeffe; "we did not say it once since the harvest began, and we may as well say it now."

"Well, mother," said Maury, "say only one decade of the Rosary. We're all so tired. Finish with that, and don't be tackin' on any other prayer to it. Remember we've to be up early in the morning."

"You ought to thank God, Maury, that you have health and strength to say it, and not to be grumblin' about it."

"I'm not grumbling, mother; but I wish we had said it early in the evening, and then we'd have had it over us."

"I declare she looks upon her prayers as a task," said Joe, who thought very hard himself of going to say long prayers at that unreasonable hour, and who would have been much more content to have simply blessed himself, said a Pater and Ave and gone to bed. "As a task! There's a nice christianable young woman!"

"I'll engage, if the truth were known, you'd think worse yourself of saying them than I do," said Maury; "I suppose

you didn't say the Rosary twice these thirty years, until the fall in the quarry frightened you."

"There's more ov id," said Joe gravely. "Not likin' to say your prayers, number wan; tellin' lies about your neighbour in regard of his age, number two; misjudgin' your neighbour's moral character, number three. Three nice sins for a girl to commit in five minutes or less, Three nice sins afore sayin' the Rosary."

"Moral character," said Maury, pushing him out of the way. "Who ever saw an old coachman with a moral character, or any character but one as tattered as an ould hat you'd put up to scare away the crows. Stand out of the way until I lay down the table."

The table in question was a long one which stood up against the kitchen wall, and rested on an iron bar, on which it hinged. When needed for use one end was supported by this iron bar, the other by a hinging prop; but otherwise it rested upright on the iron bar against the wall, out of the way.

It was usually let down for the meals; whenever, of winter nights, a game of cards was played; or when any other festivity was in course; also on occasions when the Rosary was being read, that the head of the house might kneel at the end, or such others of the family or chance visitors as wished at the sides. But if they choose to kneel elsewhere they might—there was no limitation placed on them.

"I'll help you to let it down," said Joe officiously.

"Well, you needn't. I can let it down myself," said Maury, with an assumed appearance of angry haughtiness.

"You're in a nice state to say prayers, you are," said

Joe. "' From anger, patience, an' ill-will, the Lord deliver us ! ' Mrs. O'Keeffe, would you mind, when you finish the Rosary, sayin' the Litany ov the Saints ? I think it would do me a dale ov good."

Mrs. O'Keeffe took up Joe's request as being profoundly serious, and was too simple in her way to notice the dry jocularly and malicious drollery that lay lurking beneath it.

" Indeed, I will, Joe ; an' I'm very glad you asked me. Don't mind Maury. It's too much sleep she gets."

" Thank you, ma'am," said Joe gratefully, whilst a look at Maury across the table attested his malicious delight. " An' if you say a few Pather an' Aves when that's finished, I'd like it very much. Wouldn't you, Miss Norah ? "

As every eye was directed by this abrupt question to Norah, where she knelt at the table beside Mrs. O'Keeffe, with the candle shining full on her face, there was nothing for it but to say promptly—

" Yes ; to be sure," and then covered her face with her two hands to hide the blush the abruptness of the question called into it.

" There ! Glory be to God," said Joe in a pious undertone, with that sorrowful gravity with which people sometimes talk over the failings of their neighbours, " what differ there is between people—brought up side by side, you might say. Wan likin' to say her prayers, the other hatin' 'em."

" If you don't say your prayers properly I'll throw this turf at you," said Maury, with difficulty repressing a laugh.

" Maury ! " said Mrs. O'Keeffe, laying down her prayer-book, and glancing with great reproof at her daughter, " I'm astonished at your conduct. Do you remember what you're going to say ? "

As Maury glanced with mortified good-humour at Joe, who knelt at the other side of the table from her, and saw the expression of assumed gravity and sanctity that was on his eyes and pursed-up lips, she had much difficulty to keep from laughing again.

As, however, that was what he wanted, and as it would bring further censure upon her, besides being an unpardonable breach of rural good manners, she with great difficulty restrained herself; and placing her hands over her face and eyes to shut out all view of him, gave her attention to the Rosary.

The latter was finished, and Mrs. O'Keeffe commenced, in obedience to the pious request of Joe, to recite the Litany of the Saints.

Maury withdrew her hands from her eyes, and in doing so let them fall on Joe's face. The latter, who had been apparently thinking of something else, immediately assumed once more his look of supernatural and preposterous piety. The laugh rose from Maury's light heart, at this ridiculous assumption of sanctity, but before it had developed itself too much it was turned into a hushed cough.

Afraid, however, to trust her laughing humour any longer to the tempting fiend opposite, Maury rose from her place; and, on pretext of finding it quieter, knelt in a darkened corner of the kitchen, which the light of the candle failed to illumine, and where she said the responses in undisturbed shadow.

"From imprisonment and the perils of death," read out the old woman.

"Oh, Lord deliver us!" responded half a dozen voices in subdued tones of prayer.

"From——"

A shriek from Maury fell with startling effect on the silent praying group.

"There is some one at the window looking in!—there is some one at the window! Look! See who it is!" she cried in frightened tones.

All present started swiftly to their feet. All eyes were at once turned to where the little window of the kitchen reflected the darkness of the starless summer night outside. The light of the candle being in their eyes, they could see in it nothing but blackness.

But Maury, who had been kneeling in the shadow, had readier quickness in seeing, and she averred she had seen a man's face gazing in at them and taking note of the proceedings through the window!

Her exceeding nervousness, and almost hysterical fear, in marked contrast to her light-hearted manner previously, showed at once that her statement was true—that her fears were real, and not imaginary.

"Let us see if there's anyone about the out-houses or in the *bawn*," said Charley, who happened to be present, the young man of whom we have made note before at the funeral in the Abbey graveyard.

Taking the candle from the table and placing it in a lantern, that it should not be extinguished, he hurried out, accompanied by the two men servants, and searched the houses and the *bawn* diligently; while the three trembling women and the servant girl and Joe, who was as yet unable to move swiftly about, remained within in the darkness.

"Where are the skiethogs, mother? Throw some of them on the fire, an' don't lave us in the dark like that!" said

Maury, who, clinging to her mother and Norah, was in a state of intense fear. "I'll die if I'm left in the dark. Mother, for the love of God get me a light!"

"Let me go, Maury, and I will," said the old woman, who was held fast in the girl's unconscious grasp. "You're holdin' me so tight I can't stir. Let me go, Maury, let me go!"

But Maury could not let go the grasp her startled hands had laid hold of; and the old woman was fain to bid the servant throw some split bogwood on the white ashes of the smouldering fire.

"You'll get a heap of it on the shelf. Throw it on the fire at once an' it will light up. God betune us an' all harm! are you sure you saw anyone, Maury?"

"Don't ask me, mother! don't ask me! To be sure I am."

"God betune us an' all harm! the *good people* were always hangin' about Mrs. Moore's afore they were turned out, too," said Mrs. O'Keeffe, in whose kind, patient, simple heart the dread of eviction was the only fear that ever arose, morning, noon, or night. "It's the fairies you saw, Maury."

"It was not fairies who used to come about our place," said Norah quietly, somewhat frightened too, but much more composed than the others.

She had, young as she was, gone through seas of troubles. She had heard feet often prowling about their quiet home in the stillness of the night-time. She had seen faces peering in at the window—not kindly faces of fairies in sympathy with her troubles—but faces jealous of their comfort, and hungering, hungering for the fine fields her ancestors' care and industry had made out of barren lands. She had seen

the roof-tree stripped over her mother's head, and that mother turned away in her old age from the place where her young married days were passed and her children born, to die on a stranger's floor. She had seen her brother borne off among guarding soldiers to prison on a false charge ; and amid the gleaming lights of the Court, had heard the words of a harsh judge sentence the young fellow to penal servitude for seven years.

All this she had seen and passed through ; and whilst sorrow and affliction failed to dim the entrancing brightness of her eyes, or the fascinating beauty of her face, it had left within her heart a strength and firmness that not ordinary events easily disturbed.

"It was not fairies who used to come about our place. *They* would not have turned us out of house and home. But—oh ! my God !—whose face is that I see ? Who is standing at the door—outside in the darkness ? Oh ! Maury !—for God's sake !—look—see who it is !" she screamed in great affright as the light of the skiethog, waven in Joe's hand, disclosed a form standing at the door, and a face appearing—as a dead man's face of a moonlight night might be seen peering from above a tombstone—out of the gloom !

Lifting her eyes, Maury, not less frightened than Norah herself, looked in the direction indicated. But the impression made on her mind by the apparition was vastly different from that made on Norah's, and the effect caused on her terrors different in the same degree ; for, quickly recovering herself, she snatched the torch hastily from Joe's hand, and walked boldly to the door—the light advancing before her, and throwing its brightness on the bawn outside. As she did so the form outside advanced to meet her.

"Kevin! Kevin!" the young girl attempted to cry; but the stranger, advancing quickly, placed his hand on her mouth, and, drawing her to him, kissed her.

"Who is inside, Maury?" he asked hurriedly; but the cry of the young girl had awakened the attention of the others, and as she, disengaging herself from his embrace, ran and closed the door, Norah had seen who it was, and in a second more had her arms around his neck.

"Kevin! Kevin! can this be you? Is it really you I see? Oh, Kevin, is it you I have my arms around again? Is it you, or how did you come back?"

"Hush, Norah! It is I. Don't speak so loud. I ought not to have come here to-night, but I could not help it. I could not bear to wait a minute."

"Oh! Kevin! Kevin! Can it be possible you have returned? I can hardly believe it. Oh! Kevin! I am so glad to see you!"

"And I am so glad to see you, Norah. I was in Paris, but found you had left; and knowing where you had come, came straight after you."

"This is not Kevin, is it?" said Joe, as, when Norah had disengaged her arms from around him, his eye fell on the stranger's face. "Yes, God be praised! so it is," as, stepping near to get a better view, he saw it was indeed he.

"Kevin, honey," said the old woman, "we thought you were hundreds of miles over the sea by this. How did you ever come back?"

"It would be a long story to tell, Mrs. O'Keeffe and Joe," said Kevin, as his eyes filled with tears, shaking hands with them, "but my return is a secret and must be kept a secret."

"Ah, go away, mother and Joe," said Maury, after she had closed and fastened the door with much presence of mind, "do you want to have the whole world knowing he's back? Come in here, Kevin," pushing him into an inner room that led off the kitchen, "an' hang a quilt or a blanket over the door, so that nobody can see the light. You'll find a candle inside. Put up the shutters on the window."

With these hasty injunctions, Maury, who rightly estimated the exact circumstances of the case, hurried him into the room and closed the door. Then unfastened the outer door again, as the noise of the searchers with their lights were heard approaching by the gable-end.

"The blessing of God be about us!" said Maury. "Did anyone ever see the like of that? Glory be to God! it is the dead come to life again."

"It is wonderful to think of it—glory be to the wonderful hand of God that brought him back!" said Norah, whose face was as white with surprise, as Maury's was flushed with excitement.

"Never was anything so wonderful in this world," said the latter emphatically. "Was there, Joe?"

"Never," said Joe, as he stood leaning against the kitchen table, almost inanimate from surprise. "Only, what I'd say is this; don't say anything about it when the rest come in. Let them all go to their beds at wanst. The less is known about this, you may depend upon it, the better it will be."

There was a general concensus of opinion that Joe's suggestion was quite right, and, therefore, as soon as they had returned and intimated the unsuccess of their search, they were dismissed to their beds. They slept in the rooms over the stable, where the fresh breeze, blowing from the

hayfields outside, made it much pleasanter during the summer months than if they had slept in the dwelling-house.

After the dismissal of the servant men to their beds, Maury closed up the window of the kitchen, locked and bolted the door, and then entered the parlour where the late convict was, and returned with him to the kitchen fire, but not until there was an interchange of affection that might almost have made amends for months in an English dungeon.

"And so—glory be to God!—you have come back to us, Kevin?"

"Ay, Maury—back again after months of travelling and torture. But I am so glad to be here—so glad to see you and Norah once more—that I forget it all."

"Is there—is there"—said Maury with trembling lips—"any danger to you in thus coming back?"

"Danger, darling—but we mustn't speak of danger to-night; this is a time for rejoicings and not forebodings."

"So it is," said Maury, rapidly chasing away her fears. "Oh, Kevin! how glad I am to see you again—how often I wept for you the long night through, until dawn came in through the windows, and my eyes were blind with tears. Oh! Kevin! how did you come? Where did you come from?"

"It would be a long story to tell you, Maury, darling," said Kevin, with a wearied expression, but with intense affection, as he pressed her in his arms, and kissed her white forehead; "it would be too long a story to tell you now."

"It must have been the hand of God that brought you back, Kevin. We had almost given you up for lost—as lost as if you were sleeping in the Abbey."

"It's a long story, Maury, dear, a long story of suffering, sickness, and shipwreck ; but it is all over, and I am glad—oh ! so glad !—to see you and Norah again. If I had to suffer it all over and over I would gladly do so for the unutterable joy of having you in my arms again."

"Are you so glad to see me, Kevin ?" said the girl, as, in the excess of delight, that sent the blood bounding through her heart, and the blinding tears to her eyes, she folded her hands on his arm, and wept with joy.

"What a new brightness the world has when you're back. What a new life to my heart. Oh ! Kevin ! I hope the troubles are over for us now, and that the dreadful past is gone—never to return. But I am keeping you too long from Norah. Come down to the fire. The house is quiet—and, thank God ! we can all sit around the fire together once more. Like the old times, Kevin—like the old times."

And they all did sit in their old places, and it is seldom such rejoicing hearts gathered around the hearth-stone of any home. The fire itself seemed to feel it, for it brightened and blazed up the ample chimney, and threw brilliant sparkles all around.

There was room enough for all. The chimney-place was not alone large enough to hold the blazing fire, but, being built in the form of a parallelogram, was sufficient to give abundant room for the winter gossipers. Here in the pleasant Christmas times and the long winter nights the men of the house and chance neighbours sat, and in the cheerful blaze of the pleasant turf fire, discussed the subjects of the day, or retailed the quaint romantic fables and legends of

olden tradition that have thus been handed down from generation to generation.

I always think that these fire-places, with their pleasant glow of heat, over whose form and shape a thousand years have passed unaltered, have contributed in no small degree, to the hearty social feeling, kindliness of manner, and cheerfulness of spirit of the Irish people.

Whenever the Irish people grow unsocial, morose, and gloomy, it will have been when coal has usurped the place of turf and the abominable stove the bright light of the ancient fire-place.

There was something, moreover, that made the heart feel profoundly religious, as, in the waning hours of night, the red fires smouldered into *greeshugh*, and the white ashes, piled up on the hearth, seemed a beautiful emblem of decay and death. Nowhere the rosary could be said so meetly as in the dying glow of the waning fires, and whilst the flat stones of the hearth yet retained their heat.

And when the live coals were covered over with white ashes, and "raked up" to preserve the "seed of the fire" until morning, what finer or more poetic emblem of rest and repose and sleeping life could there be?

And so with a sense of happiness that no words could describe, the re-united group talked and talked until an unexpected knocking at the door startled them from their dream of security and happiness.

CHAPTER XXI.

MIDNIGHT SCENES AT THE ORCHARD.

WHEN Harry Canavan arrived within view of the light shining from the windows of Orchard Cottage, he half regretted having come at such a late and unseasonable hour, and for a moment meditated a retreat.

But his home was now some miles away ; the hour was late ; his form, never strong, was considerably weakened with the excitement consequent on his quarrel with the steward, and he, therefore, made up his mind to rest for this night at Orchard Cottage, as he had often done before. He was a favourite and welcome everywhere, and it was through a natural delicacy of presenting himself at this late hour, and not from any doubt as to the welcome that awaited him, that prompted his hesitation.

Possibly, however, his diffidence might have prevailed and he might, even under all the adverse circumstances, have essayed the walk home, had not the remembrance of Norah's presence at the cottage attracted him thither, with the force of loadstone.

In days gone by—not very long ago, either, though it now seemed an age—he was also a very frequent and welcome visitor at Norah's house, when home there was for her in the land. Kevin and he had been great friends, and the Prophet's steps not unfrequently strayed in that direction. He would not, on any account, have admitted even to himself that there was a further and greater attraction for him

in the radiant girl who always met him with such welcoming smiles of warmth.

Canavan was deeply read in the ancient lore of the land, all its quaint legends and traditions were stored in his well-read mind ; and as he was gifted with a fascinating manner and attractive powers as a *raconteur*, his presence was always very acceptable to her, and his coming brought always a smile of pleasure to her face. Moreover, he sang well ; and there was no greater treat than to hear Harry Canavan sing one of these ancient Irish airs—so full of love and passion and melting tenderness—accompanying himself the while on the violin.

But these pleasant days had passed, and with their evanishment had come a settled gloom on his heart. Mayhap it was caused by his waning health, mayhap by sorrow for the ruin that had come on his friends and for their now roofless home ; but those who knew him best thought that it had come with the departure of Norah, and believed that—without he himself knowing it—the beautiful girl had borne his heart away with her.

Whether they were right or wrong, at any rate he was very anxious to see her again, now that she had returned. Wherefore he continued on his way, and passed up the breen that led to the Cottage, until he arrived at the gate.

The house was closed, but the light still gleamed from the kitchen window.

He tried the gate but found it locked, and was about to cross it when he suddenly stopped—in much surprise.

What form was that, that in the darkness moved about the door—now pausing on the threshold, now peering furtively in at the lighted window. Who could it be ? What motives

or intentions had this midnight visitor in thus peering about the house? Was it some emissary from Grangemore, ready to bear tidings that the returned girl had found a home there? Nothing more likely; for he well knew what a stringent rule existed on the estate forbidding tenants giving shelter to the evicted on pain of eviction themselves.

With some astonishment, and a considerable share of uneasiness, Harry Canavan watched the movements of the person at the door. It was too dark to permit him to see the flitting form otherwise than vaguely, but still he resolved to hide behind the gate-posts and watch what sinister designs this unknown stranger had.

He was startled from his hiding by the shriek of Maury from within, and by the subsequent opening of the door by the alarmed household. The unknown figure fled away into the orchard, and the watcher himself, half-ashamed of being found in such an embarrassing position, retreated down the laneway, but not so far as to prevent his seeing what passed at the door.

As the men with the lighted lantern went into the out-house in their search, he noticed the stranger leave his hiding place, come again to the door; and saw the reception that Maury had given him.

"It's Kevin!" thought he in breathless excitement. "It is no one else but he—however he has managed to return. Good God! what could have brought him back with danger all around him! What temptation could have led his footsteps here—here of all places in the world! How did he get free—if it be really he? Or what evil genius guided him to this place? Oh Kevin, Kevin!" said he aloud, apostrophising in his excitement and terror the

returned prisoner, "what a foolish fellow you were to return!"

A movement at the other side of the hedge attracted his attention, but only for a moment. Some of the cattle rustling against the hedge he thought—or a wild bird moving through the foliage. It passed from his mind in a second, and his attention was again fixed on the house.

He saw the searchers re-enter; saw them come out again and go to their respective sleeping-places; saw the curtains drawn across the parlour windows, and the shutters fastened; saw also the quilted screen placed across the kitchen window, effectually barring the rays of light from the interior—and knew instinctively the meaning thereof.

"I shall go in and see Kevin. They will not think my visit even at this hour and under these circumstances an intrusion. Heaven preserve the poor fellow from the consequences of his return. What a foolish thing to do. God help him from his enemies!"

These last words Canavan said again aloud—it was a habit he had in moments of excited thought—and as he did so a similar noise to that he had lately heard arose at the other side of the hedge. It again attracted his attention, but again he set it down to the movements of some of the cattle browsing there.

Indeed the chief reason why it had attracted his attention was from its suddenness. The noise suddenly arose and as suddenly ceased. Had it been caused by cattle rustling about it would have been continuous at least for some time. The watcher knew this very well, but the surprise occasioned by the proceedings at the door and the mysterious re-appearance of Kevin, overbore and extinguished all other thoughts.

Had he taken the trouble to investigate—had he pushed his way across and seen what disturbing cause there was—what a world of trouble would have been saved! What a change there would have been in his own fortunes! What a web of life-threads for many people were a-weaving from this spot!—and how the strands of fate for them as well as himself would have been differently coloured and interwoven had he but looked over the hedge!

If he had—how harmlessly would have shone these eyes full of malignity and hellish purpose that, like his, watched the doorway of the cottage!—how vainly moved these feet that with stealthy tread tracked him along the road he had come by! Quite unknown to the Prophet—and equally unthought of by others—the Fates were weaving fortunes, as each moment passed over, with golden strands for some and shrouding woof for others, which but a movement of his eyes would have completely changed. But the movement was not made, and the genii that hold the futures of men in their hands had fixed the warp of life or woof of shroud—it was every moment becoming firmer—until it had become hard as twisted steel, fixed and unalterable for ever in this world!

In accordance with his previously expressed intention, Harry Canavan advanced from his hiding-place, and, approaching the locked gate, prepared to cross it. But parallel to him, at the other side of the hedge, moved the stealthy figure that watched him and watched the house at the same time.

Oh Prophet! Prophet! take thine hand off the barred gate, and look around! For thy life's sake! look around thee! and see the two eyes that with the basilisk gleam of

hate and revenge gleam through the darkness. See that upraised hand and beware! One moment!—one look—only one!—

But the Prophet, all unheeding of danger, clomb the gate, had crossed the top bar, and was descending.

Suddenly! Had the stars fallen from the sky! or the trees of the orchard leaped into pillars of flame! Had a blazing comet in its career struck against the earth, burning it up for an instant and then disappeared in gloom and night?

Something of this kind must have happened, for a thousand flashes of light danced instantaneously before his eyes; the next moment a gloom blacker than that of Erebus settled over brain and nerves; he relaxed his hold on the gate and fell heavily to the ground—a gush of hot fluid pouring from his mouth and lungs.

How long he lay there he knew not—the flow of blood had probably relieved the swoon—but when consciousness returned he lifted himself to his feet, staggered with difficulty, blindly—but with some glimmering indistinct sense or instinct guiding him—to the door, rapped faintly and confusedly thereat, and—his nerves of brain and body again suspending work—fell fainting at it!

His awkward and confused knocking had awakened the attention of the happy group sitting around the fireside. Maury, from whom all her fears had been banished, and to whom self-confidence had been completely restored, hastened to open it—anticipating that it was some of the farm servants who had arisen early for some purpose.

To her extreme astonishment she saw the prostrate form extended on the threshold.

"Kevin! Norah! Mother!—for the love of God, come here! See who is this! There's some one dead here!" cried the frightened girl, as she started back in amazement.

All rushed to the door—Kevin snatching up the lighted candle in his hand and bearing it with him. A moment's consideration would have shown him the danger of thus exposing himself. But Maury's frightened cry, coming so unexpectedly, drove all considerations of self out of his head.

Bending down, and holding the candle to the upturned face, he cried:

"God bless us, Maury!—this is Harry Canavan!"

"What!" cried Maury. "No; it can't be."

"It is indeed, Maury," said Kevin in whispered astonishment. "No one else. Look!"

Maury, taking the light from his hands, scanned the face again.

"God bless us, Kevin! it is he, sure enough! What could have happened him? See! his face is covered with stains like blood. We must carry him in. Help, Kevin! Norah, stand back you!"

Kevin placed his arms under the waist of the swooning man, and whilst Maury supported his head, lifted him gently into the parlour, and placed him on the sofa.

"My God! he's dead!" cried Norah, in utter dismay, as she saw the closed eyes and pallid face of the youth.

"No, Norah, he's not dead," said Kevin, placing his hand over his heart; "but he's got badly hurt somehow. He is in a swoon."

"Maybe some of this would do him good," said Maury, her ready mind in the midst of the trouble and confusion

recurring to practical matters, and producing from the cupboard a flask of brandy.

"The very thing, Maury ; God bless you for thinking of it," said Kevin, bending down and kissing her in admiration of, and thanks for, her thoughtful helpfulness.

He poured a few drops between the sufferer's lips. A faint spasmodic movement answered to the reviving effects of the stimulant.

"He is recovering, Kevin," said Norah, who, shuddering, looked over her brother's shoulder, the while Maury gently brushed the blood-stains from his face.

"What could have happened him, Kevin?" whispered Norah again, in trembling accents of her brother.

"I don't know, Norah, under Heaven. He must have got a heavy fall—or a blow."

"A blow, Kevin! There is no one for miles around but would lose his life for him. Don't you know that?"

"Yes, I know that. That's the mystery of the business, Norah. A fall could never have hurt him so."

"It could not, Kevin?"

"No, I don't think so. Probably the poor fellow can explain it when he recovers a little. I cannot."

"It is a sad thing to happen, just when you came back, and a ray of happiness had come to us once more," said Norah, whilst her lip trembled and the unbidden tears grew into her eyes.

"Crosses and troubles *will* come, and at unexpected times" Kevin said, with a sudden inrush of sorrowful memories on his palpitating heart. "But I wonder how Harry—poor fellow!—could have come by this."

There was one outside watching through the hedge at the closed-up shutters to whom it was no mystery.

"I think I may go now," said that watcher, as after some time waiting, he arose on his hands and knees and crawled away under shelter of the hedge. "It'll be a long time again before he'll give me impudence. And so *you've* come back again, my fine convict! But you'll go back faster than you came—see if you don't! And your sister here, too! I wish I hadn't been in such a hurry to speak to Sir ——. Never mind! He won't be so ready with his whip in a short time. He'll have troubles of his own to fret about. And oh!—yes, I have it. What brings him into trouble and loss will bring them into trouble too! Everything comes to my hand as if they were sent specially for it—Eh!—What!—Who the devil are you?"

"It's me, Keliff," said a girl's voice; "Fanny."

"And what the devil brought you here this hour of the night—or how long have you been here?" asked the steward savagely.

"I was wonderin' what kept you out so late, Keliff," said the girl, weeping, "and I walked along the road to meet you. I saw you turnin' up the boreen, an' I kem afther you afeard somethin' might happen you."

"Somethin' might happen me!" iterated the steward—not so much because he meant anything by the words, but that he was prompted to say something by the pressure of a new idea which had arisen in his head. "What would happen me?"

"I dunno, Keliff," said the girl crying; "but I was afeard bekaise there's so many around the country here that have a spite against you, that some wan might do somethin' to you."

"Ay, I suppose there are," said the steward vindictively. "Let 'em. They'll have bigger raison for it afther a while. Bigger nor he has."

"Oh, Keliff, why did you hit him?" said the girl, in a terrified whisper. "Worn't you afeard you killed him?"

They were walking along furtively in the shadow of the further end of the hedge—the steward being nearest.

He stopped suddenly, as the girl spoke, and searched along the top and sides of the hedge with his hand. Failing to find what he wanted, he turned sharply around and clasped her neck with both his hands.

A terrified cry from the girl made him withdraw them as suddenly.

"I was only joking, Fanny," he said, as he continued his furtive walk; but there was something in the forced laugh that accompanied his words that made her more frightened than if he had poured imprecations upon her.

"You are angry with me, Keliff. What have I done? Sure I've only kum to meet you to see you wor safe."

"I know—I know—come away. Come away from here. Come quick!" was the hurried reply.

But instead of hurrying along with him—running at times to try and keep up with him, so fast was his moody pace—his unfortunate companion would, if she had known the thoughts that were passing through his mind, have fled shrieking from his side!

But, though greatly alarmed, she was unaware of them; and so they continued their walk across the fields in the darkness of the night—for the moon had long gone out—until the mansion of Grangemore rose whitely out of the gloom.

CHAPTER XXII.

UNEXPECTED VISITORS.

RUPERT, from the date of his arrival at barracks, had not been put on duty. His strength was not considered sufficiently restored, and the colonel, through old family ties, did not wish to send him on the unpleasant eviction work the troops of the garrison had to perform.

So that he had plenty of idle time wherein to amuse himself; wherefore the freshness of the morning repeatedly saw his horse's head turned in the direction of Orchard Cottage.

Very little care or reflection he gave to the consequences that might follow from these visits. All he knew was that a fair face, brighter than any rose on the hedge, and fresher than the dew that clothed them as with a mantle of silver network, would welcome him. Whether she sat at the window sewing, her face enshrined among the honeysuckles and clematis flowers that garlanded it, or reading in the shadow of the fruit-laden trees of the orchard, there was always a bright smile for him.

There was always a ready excuse to hand for his coming in his anxiety to visit his companion in the runaway accident.

Joe's health, Joe's recovery, Joe's condition offered on all occasions a sufficient apology for absence from barracks—even if the necessity for catering for his own not fully recovered health was not enough. And at Orchard Cottage it formed an admirable reason for his visits.

Joe's welfare, however good-natured the visitor was in

inquiring about it, occupied a very small portion of his care when there.

It was so pleasant to sit by Norah's side, and listen to her quiet conversation as her busy fingers plied the needles, or to listen to her musical voice as she read in the cool shadow of the apple-trees; or again, when Joe was fishing in the stream below in the meadows to walk with him there, and while he intently threw his line across the eddying pools it was perfectly oriental in its luxury to lie at ease tempting the lazy slumbering trout to rise, with the pleasant carpet of grass beneath, and the pleasant sun shining on them from the blue sky above.

The path of life had grown pleasant and more beautiful for him to tread. His lot was cast in pleasant places, and the golden thread of love and beauty was weaving itself into his heart and brain and nature. The world seemed to have grown more beautiful, the air pleasanter, the earth more near to perfection than he ever knew it before.

So at least he thought, one morning, as he placed his foot in the stirrup, the steel foot-rest of which was warm with the rays of the early sun, and, vaulting into the saddle, sat there composedly awaiting the coming of the Colonel, to bid him good-bye for the day.

"I am afraid there is an end of your love-making, Rupert," said the Colonel as he handed him a letter. He was always fond of pretending that Rupert's rides were in the direction of Grangemore Castle, and his visits to the heiress. "Read that—there's a letter of recall."

"That's very sudden," said Rupert, as he read the letter where he sat on horseback. "I did not expect this."

"You are glad to get back again," said the Colonel, mis-

taking his surprise. "So I should too. I am heartily tired of this unfortunate country."

"I should like to see a little more of it. I have scarcely seen any of it yet," said Rupert, holding the letter he had just read in his hands, and sitting in his saddle with an ill-concealed air of disappointment and annoyance.

"I think it is very fortunate for you to get away. How soon does it say?"

"This day week," said Rupert, glancing at it. "They scarcely gave me time even to get well."

"The best thing you can do then, Rupert," said the Colonel cheerily, "is to turn your horse's head in some other direction if you want to see the country. You have ridden often enough in that. It must be as familiar to you as the valleys in Devonshire by this time."

"I must ride out to acquaint them with the recall this one time, at any rate," said Rupert, as he sat undecided in the saddle.

"Very well, Rupert. I am sorry you are leaving us. But you should be very glad of it. There is not much here to attract an Englishman. You are very fortunate in getting away."

"I should rather stay a little longer, for all that," thought Rupert, as he cantered down the barrack square, passed the sentinel at the gates, and went forward in the direction of Orchard Cottage.

"It's a singular thing," thought he to himself, as he rode past the quarry, "that that place, so unfortunate for my uncle, should have led me into such scenes so outside the path of my intended duties. And should have introduced me to Grangemore and to—Norah! Ay, Norah! Beautiful Norah!"

As the young girl's face and eyes raised themselves before him in imagination, he put spurs to his horse and trotted more quickly.

He was anxious to know what would Norah think of his going. What position did he hold in her regard? What in her heart? Would she feel as lonely and sorrowful at the parting as his present pangs told him he unmistakably would? Was she as glad to see him as he was to see her?

These and many other curious questions arose in his mind as he rode along, creating within him more distrust and uneasiness than he would have thought possible yesterday. His previous visits had been paid without any very well defined intentions. They gave him pleasure. The sweet face of Norah, the pleasant raillery of Maury, the unembarrassed ease of his intercourse, the absence of all ceremony, and the delicacy and reserve that covered all things as with a silver mantle, made them extremely agreeable to him.

It was only now, that he was about to leave; that these pleasant hours were to conclude; that the fair face of the handsome girl should no more come before him; that he felt as if he were parting with something very dear to him, and that ties of tenderness he wotted not of before had woven themselves round his heart, and pained him now in their threatened severance.

To banish these reflections that seared him with a pain he had never felt before, he turned up the boreen that led from the road to the cottage. The gate of the meadow behind it was opened, and so he carelessly cantered in that direction.

As he passed by, the windows that opened on to the meadow were thrown wide, and he saw, with something of a

start, that an addition had been unaccountably made to the household at the Orchard.

A young man was sitting within whom he had never seen there before. Nevertheless there was something in his face, some familiar look or expression, which made it seem to him as if he had somewhere before seen it. On the sofa, very pale and white, lay another, as if very ill; and, holding the hand of the latter was—to his intense astonishment—none other than Norah! Yes, kneeling at the side, and holding his hand.

The feeling of surprise and astonishment was almost instantaneously followed by another and a very different feeling.

It was one of anger and jealousy. Who were those of whom he had heard nothing before? What mystery was there surrounding the house that had been so carefully kept from his knowledge? Whom was this with whom Norah was on terms of such extraordinary intimacy?

These questions he could not answer. Nor was the information he received when he rode round into the garden calculated to remove the distrusts and suspicions excited in his mind. Norah met him outside the door with her usual grace and friendliness—told him Joe had gone on fishing towards the Shannon, that Maury had driven by the lower road to Athlone, and that, all the cares of house devolving upon herself, he should excuse her want of courtesy in not asking him to descend and rest himself.

Astonished and astounded at this sudden change in the state of affairs, Rupert, after a short time, during which he, however, could note no alteration in Norah's manner or friendliness towards him, turned his horse's head round

and considerably damped and disappointed, took his way once more round the breen, at a much slower rate than that by which he had come, and emerged on the high road.

Who were they of whom he had unexpectedly got a glimpse? Who were these strangers, and how long had they been there? Had they been there all the time of his visitings, and, if so, why had their presence been concealed from him?

What were they to Norah that she should thus minister to them with so much affection and solicitude? Could she have been keeping this mystery from him all the time of his visits, frank and unreserved as she seemed to be?

But then, again. What right had he to challenge her conduct? What control had he, or what right to exercise, over her actions? What was he to Norah, or Norah to him, that he should care what other friends and relationships she had? There was Lucy Hargrave, for instance——

Poor Rupert!

All the high pedestal of uncare, and platonic indifference which he was seeking to build, before that unhappy thought vanished into thin space!

Lucy Hargrave was a beautiful girl, no doubt, with frank manners and pleasing address. But when Norah's unnameable handsomeness and winsomeness rose up side by side with hers in his imagination, it was only then that he knew how dearly he loved her, and what a hold she had got over him; and how her bright eyes and radiant smile and winning ways had been silently and unconsciously, and unfelt, weaving the silver web of love around his heart with a force of prevailing power stronger than bands of twisted steel.

And as this knowledge came to his thoughts, came also

crowding with it the former doubts and distrusts. Who was this friend for whom she showed such solicitude? Who was the other that sat at the window? Why had she not even hinted at these acquaintances during any of his visits? Could either of them be——had she, then, a lover? Was the charming manner, the brightness of those welcoming eyes, merely the outcome of her natural ways, and meaning nothing more than the ordinary greetings to one whom chance had made an acquaintance?

The very thought smote his soul with a feeling of terror.

"Perhaps it is so," he thought. "Perhaps it is so. I ought to ride back again and find out."

He had reined his horse partly round as he spoke, and spoke aloud irresolutely.

"Yet why should I go back? To ask her who were those in the house! As if I had a right to make use of knowledge which I only gained by chance—and by a rude chance too, for I had no business to ride that way. And what else? To ask a young lady—a stranger of a month ago!—pooh! Rupert, you are dreaming!" said he, addressing himself aloud.

"And if you are, Mr. Clarendon," said a voice beside him, "the best way to banish it is by a good rattling ride!"

Rupert looked around him with a start. The absorbing nature of his meditations had left him without sight or hearing for outward objects, and it was with a feeling of surprise, that he was unable at first to control, that he noticed Sir Hardinge and Lucy with their horses reined up beside him. The public road, not much frequented, had a border of thick grass extending on each side, parallel to the hedge,

and this had in a great degree dulled the tread of the horses' feet.

Rupert lifted his hat to Miss Lucy, and, exerting his faculty of self-possession, was speedily at his ease among them.

"Do you often soliloquise like this, Mr. Clarendon?" said Miss Hargrave.

"No, I should hope not. I did not even know I was soliloquising now," said Rupert genially.

"There was no doubt, from the fragment of conversation we were unintentional listeners to," said Miss Hargrave, laughing, "you are not exaggerated in your opinion of yourself."

Rupert not knowing or remembering, by reason of the start he had received, what it was exactly that he had been saying, and whether, by some unfortunate mischance, he had not mentioned Norah's name, was a little embarrassed.

"Yes," said he, "I was in a humour for a little self-upraiding at that moment."

"For living in Ireland, I warrant you," said Sir Hardinge. "I agree with you there! Under the present unfortunate condition of the country it is anything but a pleasant place to live in. Only think of it! A splendid house I was building on a farm from which I was obliged to dispossess a tenant, was burned down last night! Burned to the ground! What a horrible race of people!"

"Who burned it?" asked Rupert, not clear, from the statement, as to whom was incriminated.

"Who burned it!" echoed Sir Hardinge with some surprise. "Why, who burned it but those wretched people—a people whom I am sorry to say are growing more furious and ruffianly every year."

"But what motive?" said Rupert, as he turned his horse round, and, placing Miss Hargrave between them, rode on with them. "What motive could they have? People don't act without some motive in these things."

"No motive whatever. These people are too ignorant for motives. Their whole intention latterly is to burn and destroy."

"Can they not be prevented?"

"We are trying that."

"How?"

"Well, we have applied for a barrack on the townland. The application has been signed by all the magistrates in the county."

"Ah!"

"Yes, there will be some thirty men stationed there. That will quell the foul spirit."

"I should think so," said Rupert. "Thirty armed men is a formidable force."

"It is formidable in other ways than by force of arms," said Sir Hardinge.

"More formidable?"

Rupert looked puzzled.

"Yes, much more formidable."

"I confess I don't understand," said Rupert.

"In this way," said Sir Hardinge, in explanation. "They have to pay for it."

"To pay for what?"

"For this force."

"Who have?"

"The people."

"Do you mean the people who have done this deed?"

"No ; we don't know *them*, you know."

"And who then ?"

"The people generally."

"The innocent ?"

"Yes, certainly. All."

"You don't mean," said Rupert, reining back his horse and riding round, with a pleasant apology to Miss Lucy, to Sir Hardinge's side, the better to hear him—"you don't mean that people who may have had nothing to do with this burning—nay more, may abhor and detest it, for we must assume there are some such in the land—have to bear this expense ?"

"Certainly," said Sir Hardinge, amused at the simplicity of the other. "Certainly. And to pay for the burning, too."

"Even though they did not know or approve of it ?"

"Certainly !"

"But do you think that justice ?"

"Certainly, I think it justice."

"It seems to me," said Rupert, "rather an uncivilised arrangement."

"As how ?" asked Sir Hardinge.

"Why, as punishing the innocent with the guilty—and doing so knowingly."

"Knowingly ?"

"Yes ; not by accident or intention. A man may," said Rupert, "be hung sometimes by mistake, but it *is* by mistake ; but here the punishment is quite otherwise."

"But what would you have ? How preserve the peace otherwise ? How preserve order ?"

"Well, that is a question I am not competent to answer,"

said the officer. "Generally speaking I should say by leaving no stone unturned to arrest the guilty parties."

"That is much more easier said than done. You don't," said Sir Hardinge, "know the people around you or you would not say that."

"I do not ; therefore it was that I said I was not competent to answer the question how order was to be preserved. But on general grounds I think punishing the innocent with the guilty is much more likely to make the innocent become guilty than to make the rogues honest men. For the latter are not likely to sorrow over the sufferings of their innocent neighbours."

"Yet you see it is repeatedly done. The great Duke himself, when he captured a hostile town in Spain, did not wait to see who were the guilty and hostile parties. He punished, by levies of immense sums of money, and otherwise, the innocent with the guilty."

"Oh, yes ; but that was in the time of war, when——"

"But we are in a state of war here."

"I did not know that," said Rupert, rather chagrined at the interruption.

"Yes, we have the Irish enemy always here—before us and around us."

"The Irish enemy !"

"Yes, the Irish enemy ; always ready to shoot, and slay, and burn."

"I confess I have not seen any indication of it, and I have ridden about the country constantly. I have never," said Rupert, "met friendlier or kindlier people ; more quick, courteous, and ready to give information or to answer a question."

"But you are not a landlord!"

"No, truly; but I am a stranger and an Englishman, yet they have never offended me."

"But you are not a landlord. If you were ——"

"Does not that look pretty, Mr. Clarendon?" asked Miss Hargrave, pointing with her whip to a rising ground in the distance, near a bend of the road. She asked the question more to divert the conversation of the gentlemen from its present subject, which had an unpleasant tendency, and in which she could not well bear a-part, than because of any interest she had or felt in the scenery indicated.

"It is, Miss Hargrave," said Rupert courteously, "exquisite; the colours are beautifully intermixed. That field of waving corn, for instance, how well it contrasts with the dark foliage of the trees in the background, and with the striking greenness of the grass-fields beside it."

"I like the country when the Autumn arrives," said Miss Hargrave.

"So do I," said Rupert enthusiastically; "and I think it would be very difficult to find a more beautiful landscape than this. It may want the mountain scenery of other lands, but it has a rich hue and changefulness of colour peculiar to itself. It gives to one's mind a sense of wealth and fertility very pleasing."

"That sloping hill you admire so much, Mr. Clarendon," said Sir Hardinge.

"Yes," said Rupert, looking again admiringly at it.

"That is another instance of what I was saying. Tenants of mine lived there. I had to dispossess them. Why? This is a nearly perfect illustration of what I was saying. It was necessary, in the due and proper management of the

estate, to dispossess them. I could have given them a farm as good elsewhere. They would not have it. They had old-fashioned notions of keeping to the same place. I could not permit that. If I wanted to improve the estate I could not possibly allow their notions to interfere with mine. Don't you think so?"

"Yes," said Rupert vaguely, with an indistinct notion of what he was saying, for at that moment Norah Moore's face appeared before his imagination in all its wondrous beauty, and removed him, in spirit at least, far from his present company.

"Just so," said Sir Hardinge pleasantly; "I knew you were too sensible not to admit the justice of what I was saying. But, further than that, a son of the woman who held that farm as tenant from me had the audacity to join a society originated really for the purpose of murdering all landlords in the country, and for which he was afterwards transported. What do you think of that?"

"It was deplorable," assented Rupert.

"Yes. What was left me to do? The only thing that was left me to do was to dispossess them, which I did. And I am informed the misguided tenants around me think that was an act of injustice. That alone will show you the character of the people among whom we live."

"Yes."

"It was a clear question as to who should be owner, you see, Mr. Clarendon," said Miss Hargrave.

"It was, of course," assented Rupert negligently.

"It was something more," said Sir Hardinge, very much pleased at this endorsement of his proceedings; "it was a question of disputed authority; it was a question of property

and law and order versus revolution and midnight societies. The rights of property must be maintained here as in England, Mr. Clarendon ; and if we were to allow these to succumb, where would we be ? Now, these Moores, for instance, if——”

“ I beg your pardon, Sir Hardinge, what name did you say ? ”

Rupert had been thinking of Norah Moore all the time ; and as the name dropped from the lips of Sir Hardinge, it awoke his dreaming brain and wandering attention at once. Wherefore his question.

“ Moore,” said Sir Hardinge, little pleased at this mark of inattention.

“ Yes, yes, Sir Hardinge,” said Rupert courteously, now quite alive to his story. “ They were dispossessed.”

“ Yes. There was nothing else to be done.”

“ Of course not,” said Rupert, whose attention again was wandering. There was a magnet somewhere in Norah Moore’s sparkling eyes—though magnets as a rule do not sparkle—that drew his thoughts forcibly back to Orchard Cottage. “ What became of them ? ”

“ I don’t know. The son, as I told you, was transported, but what became of the others I do not know.”

“ But a very odd thing,” continued Sir Hardinge, as the officer made no remark on the last statement, “ in connection with the affair is that the convict ship in which Moore was being brought to the penal settlements was wrecked.”

“ Where ? ” asked Rupert, interested all at once.

“ In the Bay of Biscay.”

“ In a storm ? ”

“ In one of the most violent storms that came over the

seas for years, which the oldest seaman failed to remember anything to equal. Hundreds of vessels on sea that night failed to report since, and the conclusion is they foundered. Foundered, at any rate, did the convict ship; and thus this unfortunate young man was saved from further misdeeds by the merciful interposition of Providence—and drowned."

"Very curious," said Rupert in deep thought, but whether his remark applied to the interposition of Divine Providence in that behalf, or to something else that was in his head, is unknown.

"Yes," said Miss Hargrave, "but turning from those matters, which too long have occupied our attention, I think it must be close on luncheon time. You will lunch with us, Mr. Clarendon—will you not?"

"I shall have much pleasure," said Rupert, and they turned their horses' heads in the direction of Grangemore Castle, and cantered pleasantly along the road, Rupert doing his best to arrest his wandering attention and carry on the conversation.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A RIDE BY NIGHT.

WHEN Rupert and his friends arrived at Grangemore he was much surprised to find Colonel Montfort there also. The colonel had ridden after him, in the expectation of overtaking him and accompanying him in his ride, but failing to do so, had turned up to the castle in hope of finding him.

Rupert was very glad to meet him there, and was further glad when he accepted the invitation to remain at Grangemore for dinner.

The day passed very pleasantly. After luncheon they had a long ride through the country, and after dinner they strolled through the long corridors of arching trees, through which the setting sun streamed in broken and radiant magnificence, as through the glowing casements of Spanish cathedral.

After dusk, Sir Hardinge, his lady and son and daughter with the colonel and Rupert, sat on the balcony till late, the gentlemen smoking their cigars and chatting about every odd matter that turned up. It was, as Sir Hardinge and his family learned with great regret, the last week which Rupert should spend in Ireland, and the subject occupied a good deal of their conversation, and made the desire to prolong it greater.

He had fallen in so much with their ways and identified himself so much with the individuality of each one, that he had perfectly established himself in the regards of all, and they were, therefore, extremely sorry for his going. Miss Hargrave was particularly troubled at it, for in their long and careless wanderings through the garden and under the stately trees of the lawn, during his convalescence, they had been thrown so much together, that her regard for him developed rapidly—a feeling which Rupert had reciprocated up to the day of his visit to Joe.

The hour arrived, however, when it was necessary to leave, and Rupert and the colonel, with many invitations to come again the next day, or some day before Rupert's departure, and with promises on his part to do so, took their leave.

It was intensely dark, and close on midnight, when they turned their horses' heads homewards.

"It's a long way round, Rupert," said Colonel Montfort, "to go by the road it would be three or four miles at least. Is there not a short-cut somewhere in this direction—a boreen or bridle-path or something or other through the fields?"

"There is," said Rupert, "but I doubt if we can make it out in the darkness."

"We had better try," said the colonel. "I detest these long rides where there's a short-cut available."

"You would find yourself much sooner at the barrack by taking the longer way," said Rupert. "It is almost impossible to see your hand in this darkness."

"No matter," said the colonel, "we shall try it. The moon will rise in a short time."

"All right," said Rupert assentingly. "This is the path as well as I know it."

"Lead on then, Rupert," said the colonel. "We can scarcely fail to go straight, knowing the direction."

Rupert took the lead, and went on at a gentle trot where they were enabled to see that the path led through an open field, but more slowly where it got intermingled with the boreens and lanes that led to the farmers' houses surrounding.

After half an hour's journeying of this kind Rupert, who was somewhat ahead, stopped and waited for the colonel to come up to him.

"It seems to me to be growing darker," said Rupert.

"So it does to me," said the colonel. "It's the darkest night I think I ever saw. It's pitch dark."

"And what's worse," said Rupert, "we must have lost our way I am afraid. I don't know this confounded lane at all that we are in, as often as I have ridden this way."

"What are we to do?"

"I really don't know. We should have struck the high road by this time, if we had not deflected out of our way somehow."

"We may be going further astray by advancing," said the colonel.

"Of course we may," said Rupert. "And there is no chance at this hour of the night, and in this lonely place, of meeting any one to direct us."

"If we could only come across a farmhouse."

"You might pass by one in this darkness," said Rupert; "and not see it. The people are all in bed hours ago, and all the lights out."

"Look," said the colonel. "Look, Rupert. Is not that a light yonder!"

"Yes it is," said Rupert, looking in the direction where the light glimmered in a window pane.

"Whose house do you think that might be?"

"I could not say," said Rupert. "I am not sufficiently acquainted with the country to say in this darkness. Some farmhouse, I suppose."

"Suppose we ride there and inquire. It does not look far off."

"No," said Rupert, "it does not. I suppose it is the best thing we can do. You had better lead on this time—I have been so unlucky a guide."

"Agreed," said the colonel, as he moved his horse before his companion, and led the way in the direction of the light.

"Rupert!" cried he, after travelling for some time, turning to his companion.

Rupert rode up to him. He had been following mechanically—his mind filled with reflections, wherein Norah Moore, Maury Keeffe, and their unknown visitors formed no inconsiderable part.

"Why we have been travelling in a circle!" cried the colonel. "Look!"

"Grangemore Castle again!" said Rupert in astonishment, as he looked up at the pile of building in front of them.

"Nothing else!" said the colonel. "Are not we the most stupid travellers to blunder about so!"

"No, I don't think so," said Rupert. "We could not do better in this pitchy darkness. But where is this the light was?"

"Further over, we shall see it again. This angle of the house hides it from us. Let us ride there."

"Just as you like," said Rupert; "but I know my way now. We need not inquire further. I know my way to the high road, and once there we shall be all right."

"Very well; come along. There's the light," said the colonel, as they rode outside the wall that surrounded the house, and that came very close to it. "But look, Rupert! what the devil is that fellow doing there at this hour? Look!"

Reining up their horses on the sward outside the wall, they looked in through the open window at some distance from them, but not higher than their heads. A man inside was busily engaged in dipping pieces of chopped sticks into a pot that was on the fire, and taking them out and tying

them in little bundles. His back was towards them ; but they could see distinctly the interior of the room from where they sat.

Having made one little bundle he stood up and turned round to a heap of coarse flax or *borrough* that lay on a table, and from which he roughly wove the ropes that tied them together.

"I know him," said Rupert. "That's the steward," as the man tied up the small bundle and having done so, once more dipped it in the pot and laid it aside with the others.

"He is late at work," said Colonel Montfort. "Shall we call his attention by throwing a stone at the window and make certain of our way?"

"Oh, not at all!" said Rupert, "there is no need for that. I know the way now perfectly. We should only awake the whole household, and it would be so ridiculous to be seen wandering about like this in the night."

"Perhaps you are right," said the colonel. "We had better leave him undisturbed to his industry ; although it looks an odd kind of industry, doesn't it?"

"It does," said Rupert, putting his horse to a trot ; "but that's his own business. We have not much reason to complain of it, inasmuch as it led us into a safe path."

"Still one cannot help thinking it was an odd business and an odd hour to be at work ; but you're right, Rupert, our present business is to get home as quickly as we can. I am altogether too long out of barracks already. Ride quicker. I think the night is not quite so dark as it was."

"Yes, we may go quicker," said Rupert, putting spurs to his horse, and trotting quietly across the lawn, and making a wide detour around the castle to avoid making noise or

causing observation, entered on the broad avenue that led to the high road.

Once there they went more rapidly, and waking the echoes of the night, were soon clattering up the streets of Athlone to the barrack gate after a sharp ride.

"It must be farther in the night than I thought," said the colonel, as they dismounted at the doors of their quarters; "there's the dawn already breaking. Look in the sky yonder!"

"Yes, so it is, I declare!" said Rupert, looking in the direction where on the distant horizon the first rosy tinge of the dawn appeared. "I had no idea of being so late. I feel awfully tired. I shall sleep late in the morning. Don't waken me. I thought I was stronger."

And with a good night they parted inside the door, each going to his respective quarters.

"My watch must have gone astray," said the colonel as he reached his bedroom. "It's only two o'clock by it, and yet the day seems breaking."

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE BURNING OF GRANGEMORE.

RUPERT CLARENDON was awakened by a quick, hurried rapping at the door.

Lazily rousing himself from a dream, in which Norah Moore had played a conspicuous part, and in which her handsome face came to him like an angel vision, he called, "Come in."

Somewhat to his surprise Colonel Montfort entered.

"I hope I am not disturbing you, Rupert?"

"No," said Rupert, "certainly not, my dear colonel; but what brings you so early?"

"Why, my dear fellow, the fact is there is strange news—alarming news—just come in."

"Of what sort?"

"Of a very serious sort. Nothing more nor less than that Grangemore Castle is on fire."

"On fire?" said Rupert, hastily arising. "You don't say so. It cannot be possible."

"It is not alone possible, Rupert, but it is so in fact. A messenger has ridden in with the news. So dress quickly and come."

"How did it happen? Are you quite sure he is not mistaken?"

"There is no mistake in the world, I regret to say. Come here."

He called Rupert to the window looking towards the East.

"That redness in the sky yonder is not the dawn—you don't think?"

The sky, as Rupert looked, was red with a strange gleam. It shone with lurid light in the direction where he knew well the castle lay.

"No," he said, as he looked; "that is the reflection of a fire and a large one. My God! what could have caused it? Have you heard how it happened?"

"The messenger gives two reasons—conjectures rather. Number one, the vindictiveness of the tenants who have been, or are about to be, dispossessed of their holdings;

number two, the incendiary doings of some returned convicts."

"Who are they?—I have not heard of them before."

"Nor I, Rupert. Nor perhaps anyone else, for the messenger is in such a state of excitement that scarcely a word of sense can be extracted from him. But come, Rupert, quickly; the men are waiting."

"I am ready," said Rupert, and they descended the stairs and emerged into the barrack square.

The men were ready mounted, standing silently in the dark, waiting for them.

In a few moments the officers were in their saddles and riding swiftly in the direction of the fire.

Rupert and the colonel—the former especially—were not disposed to let the grass grow under their feet. Rupert had met with a great deal of kind treatment from Sir Hardinge and his family, and, placing all other matters aside, he was filled with concern for the calamity that had overtaken them.

This calamity, as they galloped nearer, became more apparent. The whole country side was illuminated with the glare of the burning mansion. When they came still nearer and within visible distance, the red flames rose high and wide, and, through the vistas of the thick groves surrounding, shone like a huge furnace. It lit up the hill that arose at some distance behind with a brightness that made the moving crowds of affrighted gazers thereon visible as in the noonday, whilst the East, where the dawn was breaking, seemed by contrast black as night.

"My God! this is awful, Sir Hardinge," said the colonel, as he rode up to the clump of trees where the baronet and his family and the domestics, who had fortunately escaped

from the flames stood, at some distance from the house, watching it burn.

Sir Hardinge's heart was too full of trouble to more than clasp the officer's hand, whilst Rupert, dismounting, with his men, picketted their horses and went forward to see what assistance could be given to save the mansion.

"How did it happen? What caused it?" asked the colonel again.

"What caused it, Colonel Montfort?" said Lady Hargrave in a voice swollen with rage and sorrow combined. "What caused it, sir? The vile incendiaries and murderers that have long infested our property—the lepers that we have permitted to remain on the land, and that would as readily have murdered us as done this."

"Peace, peace, Lady Hargrave," said the baronet, on whose overwhelmed senses her voice came with grating and discordant effect.

"Peace!" almost shrieked her ladyship, upon whom this slight check had but the opposite effect. "Peace with midnight murderers and assassins and burners! Peace with returned convicts, whose hands are red with crime, and from whom the law and you, sir"—turning to the colonel—"should have protected us. Yes, sir, protected us."

Not quite understanding the nature of this violent outburst, but quite willing to forgive and overlook anything that might be said under the present circumstances, Colonel Montfort quietly replied, with every mark of sympathy and courtesy—

"I know nothing, Lady Hargrave, of any returned convicts, nor did I hear of them until the messenger hinted at something of the kind."

"You see their handiwork at any rate, sir. That does not take much ability to find out."

"I see with deep sorrow and regret the calamity that has fallen on you, Lady Hargrave; but I am as yet wholly unacquainted with the cause of it."

"That shows, sir, the amount of protection we may expect from those that are paid to do their duty."

"Lady Hargrave——." The colonel was about to remonstrate against this insulting language, but the enraged lady went on—

"Yes, sir, to do their duty. Returned convicts, escaped criminals, are allowed with impunity to infest the country, to murder, and destroy by midnight torch the homes of the land. There!"—and her outstretched hand pointed in the direction of the flames—"there is a specimen of their work!"

As the colonel looked at them and saw the destruction which they were causing, the momentary anger he had felt at her ladyship's heated words melted into nought before the generous wave of sympathy that passed over his heart.

"I deeply deplore this cruel loss," he said, kindly. "You speak of returned convicts having committed this dreadful outrage. What reasons have you—pardon me for asking the question, but I shall have every house and hedge through the county searched for them if that be the case—for saying that there are any such in the county?"

"You have evidence before you, sir, that there are. If you need further proof you have not to go far to find it. Here"—turning to the steward—"tell Colonel Montfort what you have seen."

The colonel listened with great intentness to the narrative

the man told him, and when he had finished, said to one of the soldiers who had remained with the picketted horses—

“Tell Lieutenant Clarendon I wish to see him at once.”

That officer soon rode up, and the colonel, with a good deal less than his usual friendliness, said :—

“Lieutenant Clarendon, take a troop of horse with you at once—this man, will guide you on your way—and arrest the party or parties whom he will point out to you. Bind them and bring them to the barrack-prison !”

Rather astonished at this formal address from the colonel, so unusual with him, Rupert at once proceeded to put the order in force. So, gathering together a troop of his men, and providing a mount for his guide, they were soon trotting rapidly down the avenue to the high road.

He was too full of the exciting scene he had witnessed and of regret for his late host and his family to think much of aught else ; so he suffered his guide in silence to lead him whithersoever he would. He made no inquiries, and asked no questions—indeed, scarcely ever addressing him, satisfied to do his duty when the occasion arose.

He was busily engaged pondering over the changed demeanour of the colonel towards him, when they reached that part of the way where the road that led to Orchard Cottage branched off the main one. He was perfectly familiar with the place, he had ridden there so often ; and the familiar landscape in the dawning light called up at once the delightful vision of Norah Moore before him. It even occurred to him what a pity it was not further advanced in the morning, that he might pay a visit, when, to his astonishment, the guide turned his horse's head in that direction.

He promptly reined up.

"What do you mean by this? What do you mean by taking this direction? Where are you going?" he asked, whilst a feeling of inexpressible alarm crept over him.

"I am going where I am told to go—and where it is your duty to go," said the guide gruffly.

Rupert glanced more sharply at him. He at once recognised the face of the man whom he had seen in altercation with Sir Hardinge, and whom he had seen the latter so unmercifully horsewhip. Also, he remembered him as the same to whose conversation by the streamlet's bank he had been an unwilling listener, and further as the one whose gait and appearance bore such extraordinary likeness to those of Marmaduke.

"On my honour!" thought Rupert, as all these things flashed on his mind simultaneously, "I shouldn't at all wonder if his singular statement to Sir Hardinge were perfectly correct. It's a most extraordinary likeness. Oh! woman! woman! What a world it is!"

It was, perhaps, a necessary sequence to these thoughts that he should ask aloud—

"What is your name?"

"What is it to you what my name is? That's not what you're here for."

"Perhaps not," said Rupert quietly, "but as I have to make mention of it in my report, it is essential I should know it."

"My name is Keliff McNab," said the other surlily.

"You're the steward?"

"I *was* the steward."

"Are you not still?"

"I was—until yesterday."

"By the way," said Rupert, a vague kind of remembrance breaking in on him anew, "I have seen you somewhere lately—have I not?"

"I have answered enough of your questions," said the man. "Are you going to ride on?"

"Where? Where are you leading?—where are you guiding us to?" asked Rupert, a fresh accession of vague fear coming over him, as he bethought of the direction in which his guide was motioning him.

"Are you ready to come, or must I return to Lady Hargrave and tell her you won't?"

"Where are you bringing us?—I have a right to know that?"

"Are you ready to do your duty?" asked the quondam steward in such insulting manner that Rupert felt his fingers clutching tightly the riding whip he carried.

"Where are you going?"

"If you don't come, and that at once, I'll ride back," said the guide, apparently preparing to put his resolution into practice.

"Go on," said Rupert angrily, "but see that you lead me on no fool's errand, or by the Lord I'll——"

"You'll what? Maybe you don't like the work. Maybe you'd rather let them——"

"See, sir," said Rupert, incensed at the other's insolence, "lead on and address me no more."

"I didn't address you. It was you addressed me."

Rupert made no reply, but, drawing his horse aside, made room for him to pass on and go before, for hitherto they had been riding together.

A feeling of terror crept over him as the knowledge came

with certainty that their destination was Orchard House. All the incidents of the past few weeks, especially of the past few days, came rushing into his head.

Who were these unknown strangers that he had seen in the place? Had this mysterious visit anything to do with them? Was it any one of them that he was about to arrest? And if it were—oh, Heavens! what a mission to send him on. How could he, who had so often gone there a welcome guest—whose heart had carried away therefrom dreams of delight and intoxicating love—how could he go there now on such hateful and unwelcome business? And if it were some friend of Norah's—as Heaven knows it might be—how could he ever face her again, or appear in her presence?

"Oh, woe for me if it be so!" he said to himself in a paroxysm of despair, as he thought in a bewildered sort of way over it, whilst the big drops of terror stood out on his forehead.

Still he hoped against hope that the guide might pass on, or deflect in some other direction.

But all doubts were speedily set at rest when, as they came to a turn of the narrow road or breen that brought them within a stone's throw of the house, and whilst yet the tall hedges prevented their being seen, the guide stopped.

"You had better station your men around the house, otherwise they may escape," he said curtly.

"This house! Orchard House?" said Rupert, trying to repress his horror at the suggestion.

"Around this house—Orchard House," said the guide, with an insulting sneer. "You appear to know it well."

The man's manner was so insulting, and his own temper

so irritated that Rupert raised his riding whip to strike him.

Remembering his position, however, he lowered it again, and sternly asked :

"Whom do you expect to find here? Remember we are not to annoy innocent people."

"You'll know who we want when I show 'em to you," said the man with continued insolence. "Are you goin' to do as I tell you, or are you goin' to let 'em slip? Maybe that's what you'd like."

"Do you mean," asked Rupert with excessive bewilderment, and scarcely able to realise what he was called on to do, "that it is in Orchard House the parties you look for are concealed?"

"Aye, there and nowhere else. An' where they won't long be if you do your duty after this fashion. Maybe you'd better give up the command to the sergeant. He'll do his duty, never fear."

The fellow's words were insolent and hurtful ; but the last mocking suggestion stirred Rupert ; so, without seeming to take any notice of his words, he gave the necessary directions to his men, who, with pistols in their hands, quietly passed through the opened gate that led into the orchard, and soon formed a cordon around the house.

Meantime, he advanced himself towards the cottage. In truth in doing so he had no clear idea of what he was about. Only that to remain outside, whilst his soldiers were searching the house—that house in which he had spent such pleasant hours, and in which was one so dear so very dear to him—seemed such a dishonourable proceeding that he could not endure it. Wherefore, with a heavy

heart, and quite unknowing what he should do or say, he advanced and opened the gate leading into the bawn, and entered.

A little party—consisting of Maury O’Keeffe, her mother and Norah Moore—were at breakfast in the parlour. Save and except the sick youth lying in his bed, there was none other in the house.

They had been up from an early hour, for the tramping of many people rushing to the fire, taking short cuts apast their garden, had awakened them.

As Rupert entered, they were greatly surprised, not alone at his appearance at so early an hour, but at seeing him for the first time in uniform. They were, however, very glad to see him ; but when he began to explain the purpose of his visit, their alarm and consternation were excessive.

All the servants of the house had gone to see the fire at the burning mansion—Kevin with them ; but they knew well that he would not go near it, and that, fearing detection, he would return when the day advanced. It was only the evening before that it had been decided amongst them that the safest thing under the circumstances was for himself and Norah to leave the country, and await in Paris, with their uncle, happier times. They were even discussing this very matter when the entrance of Rupert attracted their attention. What was to be done—what could be done ?

“And you of all others, Mr. Rupert Clarendon, to come on such an errand ! You to bring your soldiers here to search. You !”

Thus Norah, standing up in dismay, when the officer, with extreme embarrassment and pain, had communicated his unpleasant business.

"I assure you, Miss Moore"—his tongue halted at the name of Norah, by which he had been accustomed to address her—"I did not know ten minutes ago either my business or my destination. If I did I can safely say that I should have declined ; but being here, my duty left me no other course."

"I am sorry your duty brings you here—here where your presence was so often made welcome. But do your duty ! Search, sir ! and see what incendiaries and criminals you will find here under this roof."

She was about passing from the room, with a haughty sweep of anger and disdain, when Rupert, who thought he had never seen her looking so handsome as now, with a gesture of self-deprecation, sought to stay her.

"I swear to you, Miss Moore, that I am here most unwittingly. I would not cause you an instant's pain knowingly. I beg you to believe me when I say that——"

"Your presence here, sir, shows it," said she, interrupting, and passing him by.

"*You* will at least believe me, Miss O'Keeffe," said he, turning for sympathy in his painful position to the young girl. The look of disdain with which Norah passed him cut him to the bone, and added a deep sense of humiliation to his previous embarrassment.

But Maury was otherwise occupied than in thinking of his embarrassment.

A whirlwind of thoughts ran through her head, as he unfolded his mission. Who had informed on Kevin ? Who knew of his return ? Who but Rupert Clarendon himself.

That was the conclusion she hastily jumped to. And where was Kevin ? Would he have the good fortune to keep

away from the house for some time? Would some good genii—would his guardian angel—bear him information of this visit of the soldiers, and keep him away? Anywhere from the house, anywhere or any place for an hour or two.

Oh! the fervent prayers that, with her heart beating tumultuously, Maury offered up for his safety.

What could she do? Who could she send to warn him of the danger? All were away; even Joe had hurried with others to the fire.

Not quite certain what step to take, she walked to the back window. Her heart nearly turned to stone when she saw the cordon of soldiers around the house. She hurried to the front window; and there, as she looked through the hanging flowers and wild clematis that screened it, the red-coats were also visible!

"Merciful God! Oh, Mary the comfortress! protect him. Oh, Kevin! Kevin! God protect you and keep you away for an hour or two—oh! for ever! sooner than fall into their dreadful hands again!"

Her mind was too excited to hear the words which Rupert addressed to her. In the turmoil of her excited thoughts she was even unconscious of his presence.

Construing her manner to mean anger and dislike to himself, and finding no response to his words, he slowly withdrew from the apartment; and his guide, with the sergeant and one or two others, proceeded, under his unwilling superintendence, to search the premises.

"See, sir! This, perhaps, is one of the criminals whom you seek," said Norah, as she led the way into the room where the injured youth lay.

The hurt which he had received had added to the tendency

to consumption that possessed him, and his wounded lungs, instead of healing, had grown worse. The blood had poured time after time with remitting frequency from his lungs. His face, as he sat propped with pillows, was thin and pale, and it did not need an experienced eye to see that the shadows of death were hovering around him.

He looked up with surprise as he saw the soldiers enter.

He guessed at once the purport of their visit, and a stern flush settled on his face as he made a movement to rise. But the weakness of his frame feebly answered the indignant prompting of his spirit, and he lay back again. It was only then that he really felt how much his strength had departed, and in a feeling of intense sorrow and sadness at his uselessness, he placed his hands across his eyes. "If he only had the strength he had six months ago."

Poor Prophet! that strength was gone, never on this earth to be restored.

Norah promptly understood the fiery look of alarm and indignation that flushed across his pallid face, and rightly knew that the sorrowful gestures arose mainly from his sense of his powerlessness to help her.

Passing over to his bedside she placed her hand with gentle touch on his forehead.

"Don't fret, Harry," she said gently. "You will have your old strength back again. Don't heed these worries."

Rupert stood paralysed with shame. He was overcome with annoyance that he should have thus, in discharge of policemen's duties, intruded into the sick chamber; and Norah's gentle kindness to the patient made him ready to sink to the ground at what he considered—in the agony of his tortured feelings—his own cruelty and unmanliness.

"Come out of this, men—come away from the sick chamber. Come out, you scoundrel!" said he, in his disgust, catching the guide by the collar and hurling him out of the apartment; "how dare you bring his Majesty's soldiers to insult a sick room!"

Notwithstanding that he was cowed a little by this rough treatment, the guide insisted on making further search even to the out-offices, the barn, the cowhouse, the stable; but there was no discovery.

There was nobody there.

Very much pleased with the non-results of his unpleasant mission, Rupert had arrived at the orchard gate where he had first seen Norah, for the purpose of ordering the men to withdraw and form up, when he was electrified by a cry from the guide.

"There he is! There he is. Seize him, men! There is the returned convict! There is the burner! Seize him!"

And, not content with this, dashed off himself in the direction to which he pointed.

A cry of anguish and despair burst simultaneously from the lips of the two girls. They had come out to see the soldiers move off, whilst their trembling lips and white faces indicated how much they wished to see them do so, and their tremulous anxiety lest the fugitive might return before that movement had taken place.

The cry of torture and agony that burst from their lips showed how their fervent hopes and anticipations had been dashed to pieces!

Looking in the direction Rupert perceived a young fellow in the grasp of his soldiers. The prisoner appeared to have been taken by surprise, and, as if advancing homewards

through the orchard, he had been prevented by preoccupation of mind, or by the thick growth of apple-trees, from seeing the soldiers. So that he was seized and handcuffed before he was aware of it.

"Kevin! Kevin! Oh, Kevin! was it for this you returned!" cried Maury, as she flew in agony to him. But Norah, the first scream of terror and dismay over, sank down in a swoon on that very seat where her bright eyes had first looked up to Rupert, carrying surprise and admiration and love into his heart.

In a paroxysm of love, self-anger and disgust, he knelt at the young girl's feet, not at first comprehending that she had fainted.

"Norah, forgive me—forgive me, the unwitting cause of this sorrow! I am pained—I am broken-hearted—that I should have been—Oh, merciful God! she is insensible. Norah! Norah! Here, some one, attend to this poor girl, and——"

But Mrs. O'Keeffe stood at his elbow, and gently moving him aside, bestowed her attention upon the broken-hearted girl, bathing her forehead and opening her dress to give her air.

Meanwhile Maury had reached Kevin, and throwing her arms around him as if she would tear him from his captors, addressed him in pitiful and imploring language.

"Oh, Kevin, Kevin! light of my heart and glory of my eyes, was it for this you came back! Oh, Kevin, are we again separated—and so soon! Oh, merciful Mother of God protect us this day! Oh, Kevin, Kevin! what are we to do without you!"

The sergeant, who appeared to take even more command

in the matter now than Rupert, desired the men to bring their captive forward. It was with difficulty they were able to separate her from him. They were about to use harsh measures when Rupert arrived on the scene.

"Hold there, men! None of that!" said he, sharply, as some of them were about to force her hands. "None of that. Don't touch her! Stand aside—at once!"

The soldiers fell back, and Maury, hearing the sound of his voice, withdrew her twining arms from Kevin, and threw herself at Rupert's knees.

"Oh! Mr. Clarendon! have pity on us. Don't take him away again. He has been long enough away! He has done no harm! In the sight of God and man he has done no harm! He was only too true and too good and too loving. It is only villains like this man," pointing to the guide, "that swore away his freedom before, and they will swear away his liberty and life again. Spare him—oh, spare him—if only for his sister's sake!"

"Rise up, Maury! rise up! Don't kneel to me. For God's sake stand up."

He bent down and lifted her up in his arms.

"What is this you say, Maury?" he whispered. "What do you say of his sister? Is this Norah's brother?"

"Oh, yes, yes," sobbed Maury, with much difficulty keeping herself from swooning also.

"Her brother—that was transported?"

"Yes, yes, the same."

"Heaven save and forgive me! What cruel destiny sent me here!" said the young officer, now completely overwhelmed with distress.

"You will let him free, Mr. Clarendon—will you not?"

said Maury, who, in her anxiety and impatience, thought she saw him softening, and that he had only to say the word and the captive was free.

"Alas! Maury, what you ask is impossible. I could not now, though it were my own brother that stood there. But I will ——."

He paused a little to try and recollect what it was that he could do.

"You will, Mr. Clarendon, let him free?" cried Maury, with a strong disposition to fall at his knees again.

"I cannot, Maury. I am sorry—I am sorely grieved—that I cannot—but I shall see that he is fairly treated. I shall do everything I can for *her* sake," he added in a burst of despair at his helplessness.

"But he is innocent, Mr. Clarendon—innocent. He never did hurt or harm to anyone, though he was sorely tried and punished himself," implored Maury.

"What is he accused of?" asked Rupert, turning to the sergeant and his guide.

"Of burning Grangemore Castle last night among other things—of being a returned convict," said his guide.

"Liar!" said Maury, turning fiercely round on him; "he never did it—never dreamt of it. And if he was convicted—who swore against him? Who? You, liar and coward that you are! And if anyone set fire to the castle—if it wasn't an accident—there was no one would do it sooner than yourself. The cowardly tongue that would swear a lie would find a cowardly hand to do worse. You may disguise yourself—but you will get your reward sooner or later."

The guide crouched beneath her denunciation. All the more, indeed, that he had often cast envious glances on

herself, and "made up to her," as the country people phrased it.

But Maury, though ready to bandy a pleasant word with him as with everybody else, out of the lightness of her heart, never entertained a thought about him further. Still the dull, heavy nature of the Scotchman mistook her nod and smile and sparkling repartee for liking, if not love; and one of his reasons for seeking the farm of the Moores, and for having Kevin transported, was that he might the more readily obtain the graces of the handsome daughter of Orchard Cottage.

He had not, indeed, until now known how much he was destroying his prospects with this untoward adventure. His dull brain had not the quickness to perceive that even if there were a chance for him this mode of procedure would have destroyed it. The belief that impelled him was that if Kevin Moore were once banished without prospect of return Maury would be the more readily inclined to entertain his proposals—the magnet that attracted her being removed.

There was no further time for delay, so the sergeant, who was uneasy, said, and Rupert found it necessary to return.

"You will explain to Norah—Miss Moore—Maury," said he, "how little aware I was of where I was going, or what it was I was compelled to do. God knows, I have suffered more this morning than I have ever suffered before. But, Maury"—and he whispered into her ear—"tell her to keep her heart up; tell her her brother shall be well taken care of. I have friends, Maury, powerful friends—and it will go hard with me or I shall see justice done her brother."

And shaking hands with the weeping girl, the soldiers moved off, bringing their prisoner away with them; formed

up in the same part of the lane they had separated in ; and in a few moments the tread of their retreating horses alone reached Maury's ears where she had thrown herself on her knees in the orchard, half in swoon and half in frantic prayer.

The heavy cloud of smoke that arose from the burning pile darkened the way, as they cantered over the road near it, on their way to Athlone. But a heavier cloud of sorrow and regret lay on Rupert's heart, and an equal weight of darkness and terror, though of a different kind, on that of his captive.

For whilst the former was filled with annoyance and trouble for the part it had been his cruel duty to perform, and for the renewed sorrow and shame he had been the means of bringing on the beautiful girl whom he would have given his life to protect, the mind of his captive conjured up dreadful scenes of the prison yard and the convict cell, until his eyes darkened with terror.

Every day of hopeless sorrow, every night of sleepless suffering he had endured before ; every foot of the weary way he had walked, with the fetters on his hands, before his exhausted senses grew oblivious in the fever, came up to his mind with wonderful vividness. Never to see Ireland again ; never to see his sister's face ; never to see the love-light kindling for him in Maury's eyes—never——

The cavalcade swept through the barrack gate of Athlone before his mind had taken cognisance of the fact that he had yet reached the town.

He soon heard the old familiar sound—so awful in its familiarity—of the bolt fastening in the door outside, and the click of the lock that firmly fastened and secured it.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE LEADERS IN COUNCIL.

"WELL, boys," said Darby Kelly, as three men sat in the firelight of a semi-deserted cabin on the banks of the Shannon, ostensibly with the intention of fishing, for some rods and lines and a fishing net were beside them, some nights after the burning of Grangemore mansion—indeed on the eve of the trial of the prisoner ; "we didn't think we'd be called together so soon last time we met."

"No, nor for such a purpose," said the music-maker—this time occupied not in making music with his iron heel on the moss-covered side of a tomb, but in the more congenial occupation of throwing bog-timber on the burning turf.

"Av coorse not," said the former, as his deep-set eyes glared into the coals ; "who could have expected that ? It's a strange world, but the strangest thing any wan ever heard of is to think that Kevin Moore kem back out of the say and the storm an' is on his thrial again."

"Ay," said Charley, holding a tin measure, containing whiskey, in his hands, "an' as innocent of what he's charged wid as the child unborn."

"He had no more to do wid it nor you an' I have, Charley," said Darby Kelly. "Pass the dhrink round. My throat is as dry as a limekiln wid thinkin' ov it. It's little ov that kind ov thing he had in his head I'm thinkin'."

"He'll be found guilty for all that—take my word for it," said the music-maker, re-seating himself at the fire, and like the others gazing gloomily into it."

"An' 'll be hanged too—if there's nothin' to stop 'em," said Charley, in a dull, heavy way.

"Ay," said Darby Kelly, "as they've hung many a man afore. An' as they will many a wan agin. Much they care about it. What's to be done?"

This appeared to be a question—like many other questions—more easily asked than answered. So all present seemed to think, for there was no reply. The tin measure passed silently from one to the other, but no one spoke.

"What's to be done?" the speaker asked again, as no response came. "Bekaise if he is hanged in the wrong an' no finger lifted to save him, we might as well all quit the counthry at wanst."

"You're right there," said the music-maker.

"Av coorse I am. If they hang him they'll hang more nor him. They're like tigers, one drop ov blood only sets 'em thirstin' for more."

"True enough," said Charley, glaring more steadfastly into the fire, which, blazing up, had now begun to throw grotesque shadows on the whitewashed walls and thatched roof.

"The man that's turned out after this may look out for himself if anything takes place that's not right—no matter whether he did it or whether he didn't."

"So he may," assented Charley.

"Well, what's to be done?" inquired the music-maker sinking his voice to a whisper. "No matter what comes or goes there ought to be some effort made to save him. For in savin' him we're savin' ourselves."

"That's so" assented Darby Kelly. "But what is to be done? No one can get into the jail."

"No, unless one was a bird."

"An' the sojers 'll be around him when he comes out?"

"Ay will they—by the score."

"Then, what's to be done?" inquired the speaker, with great discontent in his whispered questioning.

There was no response to this question either, for all were busy thinking, but without finding any likely way out of the difficulty, and it was not a time for volunteering idle suggestions.

"There would be no use in thryin' to rescue him as soon as he comes out ov the jail—on the way to the court-house?" suggested the music-maker, more because he felt it necessary to keep the conversation open than for any practicability or feasibility his suggestion had.

"Not the laste," said Darby Kelly. "They'd cut down the whole barony in twenty minutes wid their swords or they'd shoot 'em down wid their fire-locks."

"Ay," said Charley, "an' supposin' a sudden attack did relaise him, how long would he be free? Where could he go to in the broad daylight? Where, that he wouldn't be rearrested and brought back in half-an-hour?"

"That's true," said Darby Kelly, with a huskiness in his voice that betokened a sinking at his heart. "But somethin' must be done. I declare to God, I'd rather die myself than see him danglin' from the gallows."

"God bless us!" said Charley, as the vivid picture thus presented to his mind shocked him. "It won't—it mustn't—come to that."

"Then you'd better think what can be done to prevent id."

"I can't think ov any thing," said the music-maker

despondingly. "We can't fight all the regimints in Athlone?"

"No, we can't," assented Darby Kelly.

"I haven't slept a wink this night thinkin' ov id," pursued the music-maker. "If I do fall off for a short time it's thinkin' ov the gallows I am, and the form danglin' from id. A form swingin' an' swayin' an' shudderin', wid the white cloth over its face—like the time Farrell Kinsella was hung for what he had no hand, act, or part in—you all remimber that, an' how——"

"For God's sake, stop that," said Charley, with great earnestness. "I feel as if there was a rope around my own neck this minit. There's a cold shiver down my back as if a stream of ice-water were runnin' down it. Don't spake of hangin'——"

"Boys, look!" said Darby Kelly, in tones so strange and significant, and so out of the usual tenor of the conversation, that all eyes were quickly turned on him. His gaze was fixed on the white-washed wall, and thither all eyes followed his.

"The Cross of Christ be about as!" was the terrified expression of Charley. "What's that? What's the manin' ov that?"

A shudder passed through the group as they looked on the wall, and they drew closer around the fire. For plainly and unmistakably outlimned thereon, in rough shadow, thrown by some unseen barrier, that interposed between the wall and the blazing logs on the hearth, was the figure of—a man hanging! A man with slouched hat bent down over his eyes, with beard on the chin, as shown by the profile of the face. As it swayed and changed, lifted and fell, with the rising and falling of the fire-light, it did indeed seem to

the astonished gazers—whose eyes were fascinated by the weird appearance—as if it swayed and moved with the muscular contractions of suffering!

"God save us! What is it?" whispered Darby Kelly in accents that seemed pregnant with horror.

"I don't know," said Charley, shudderingly. "Look! it's changing——"

"It's going!—thanks be to God!" said Darby Kelly under his teeth, "it's fading. It's gone!"

Whether it was a chance shadow thrown by the fire or not, it certainly was palpably dying out—vanishing—and when the speaker had ceased it had, indeed, become invisible. Beam and rope and swaying figure had disappeared, and there was no shadow nor picture on the white-washed wall.

"That's an extraordinary thing, isn't it?" asked the music-maker, who had remained spell-bound under its influence.

"Awful," assented the others, still fearing to speak aloud. "What was it?"

"It was a shadow the fire threw," said the music-maker, anxious to relieve the gloom and the weird feeling by saying something cheerful.

"Maybe it was," said Darby Kelly doubtfully. "Did you see the face—an' the nose? D'ye know anyone it was like?"

"Don't talk any more about it," said Charley with a gruesome shiver. "Let it be. Is there any use in staying here longer?"

"I don't think there is," said the music-maker. "I feel as if I were a-chokin'. Come away. We can talk freer outside!"

"So we can," assented Darby Kelly, "there's a cowld shiver over me—I don't know why. We oughn't to stay here a minit more."

"I'll tell you what we'll do," said Charley: "Let us go and see Harry Canavan. He's very bad, but he'll be glad to see us, an' he'll advise us what to do. Anyhow there's no good to be done stoppin' here; so come along. There's somethin' unlucky about this house. We shouldn't have come here at all, *Hanna mon dhoul!* Did ye hear that? There's some one dhrownin' in the Shannon outside!"

All started to their feet, the recent terror driven away, or rather added to, by the newer one. For borne in through the rickety door, or down the chimney, or in both ways together, came—all the more startingly that they had been talking in nervous whispers—a cry that seemed pent-up with agony and deadly fear! It rang on them, from the night and darkness outside, so laden, so pregnant with terror and desperation that none but one on the brink of sudden and unexpected and deadly peril could give utterance to!

"There's a woman dhrownin' in the river sure enough," said Darby Kelly, after listening for a second or two for a repetition of the cry. "Come on, boys, there's a life to be saved, an' not a minit to be lost!"

All rushed to the door; but it had been firmly barred and locked on their entering, and in the haste now the lock refused to turn. In their feverish hurry even the bolts made of rough wood, that would, under other circumstances, have been easily removed by quiet hands, but got the more entangled in their nervous haste.

"What the *dhoul's* amiss with it?" said the music-maker

impatiently, "pull it down, boys, door an' all! The hinge is rotten, an' one good pull 'll bring it down."

"That's the very thing," said Charley breathlessly. "Lay hould o' that bolt, both of you, an' pull."

It would have been a stronger door than this one was to have resisted the vigorous, half-frantic arms that essayed to tear it down; and, accordingly, with one sudden effort of strength they tore it inwards—joint and door-posts, bolts, locks, door and all!

"Now, boys," said Darby Kelly, preparing to leap across the fallen door and *debris*, "let's run; we may yet be in time — Good Providence!—who is this?"

The question was addressed to a figure that stood confronting them at the door, standing clearly enough against the darkness outside! A form with beard on the chin, shaved face, and a slouched hat bent down in the excitement, or for purpose of disguise, over his face.

The three men, cut short in their hurried intention, looked at one another with startled significance, as their eyes fell on the form confronting them.

"It's the steward," burst from all lips simultaneously.

"It is," said the figure, advancing a little towards them, which gave them opportunity to see how fluttered and excited he was. "Did you hear a cry?"

"Ay did we!" cried all together. "What was it?"

"I don't know," said the steward, smoothing down his front and collar, which were torn and in disorder. "I heard it, and was running to see what it was when I heard the noise here."

"It's very strange," said the music-maker; "where was it? Where did it come from? It must be some one

dhrownin'. For God's sake let us hurry. Where d'ye think it kem from?"

"I thought it came from here," said the steward. "I couldn't tell where else it could come from."

"Nonsense!" said the music-maker; "it's from some life a-losin' in the river. Come on an' see!"

And without more ado he leaped the fallen door, followed by all the others, and hurried riverwards—tenants and steward for once in their lives making common cause.

But there was no sign of drowning person on the swift rushing Shannon stream. Nor was there cry to indicate that any living thing was struggling for life on its dark waters. They scattered and ran up and down its banks as swiftly as they could, considering the scrubby brushwood and tangle of rushes and flaggers that grew thereon. They called aloud to see if any response would come to their cries. But none came.

"There's no use in waiting longer," said Darby Kelly, after nearly an hour had been spent in fruitless search.

"I think not. God be merciful to her, whoever it was," said the music-maker; "she'll not see the sun rise to-morrow. The Shannon won't give up its dead to-night."

"Have you—have you anything to drink?" asked the steward, who was shivering as in ague fit. "I'm cold and wet. I think I am ill."

"Have you," asked Darby Kelly, "anything left in the bottle, Charley?"

"I have," said Charley, examining the flask which he had hastily thrust into his breast when the grim shadow on the wall caught his frightened attention. "Here it is."

If it had been of ambrosia, Charley, in his good nature,

would not have refused it to the shivering man beside him. If for nothing else, for the unexpected interest and humanity he had shown in his exertions to find out and give aid to the unknown creature drowning.

The steward took the flask. It was with difficulty—so wet and cold he was—that he could raise it to his lips or hold it with his trembling hands. But he managed to drink it for all that, and seemed the better for it.

"I'll meet you at the lime-kiln at the cross roads," said Charley, in a whisper, to the music-maker. Then aloud: "There's no use in remaining here longer. We can do no good. It's time to be going home."

There was a ready assent to this on all hands, and the party separated, Darby Kelly and the music-maker going in one direction, Charley and the steward in another.

Whatever conversation the former might have on their way, there was not much to record of as occurring between the latter pair, for they walked on in silence, the Scotchman shivering as if with an ague fit all the way. So strongly did his teeth chatter that, were he ever so much inclined for conversation, he could scarcely command himself for purposes of articulation. His companion saw this and refrained also from speaking.

But when he saw the steward well on his way to Athlone, he bade him good-night, turned into the fields, and deflecting to the east described a rapid semi-circle, and was soon with his companions at the lime-kiln.

"Well, boys," said the music-maker, "this has been a strange night—hasn't it?"

"Ay, an' very little done," said Darby Kelly, "an' time so pressin'. To-morrow the trial takes place."

"So it does," said Charley, quickening up to this fact—"that's the thing to be talked over now, and nothing else. We have done or thought of doin' nothin' yet. Let us go to Harry Canavan. He'll see us and advise us what to do."

"Yes, yes—come along, that's the very thing!" said Darby Kelly, "there's not a minit to lose. We can talk of other things another time, but we must go as fast as we can now. Otherwise we won't have a word for the boys to-morrow, nor an advice nor a direction to give."

Their way was too rapid across the fields and over hedges, and by short cuts to Orchard Cottage to permit of a word being spoken; so they took their swift way stealthily and in utter silence.

Arrived there they had but little difficulty in gaining entrance. There was but small chance of sleep closing the eyes of anyone in Orchard Cottage that night. The morrow was too pregnant with torture for them, the interval too laden with heartrending suspense. The two girls were sitting by the bedside where the sick youth was, discussing in words half sob, half *caoine*—echoes of their despairing hearts—the fortunes that another twenty-four hours might bring.

Their eyes brightened, however, at the entrance of the three men. Great as was their woe and painful their anticipations, the incoming of friends had a cheering effect. Even the face of the sick youth, pallid with loss of blood and worn with the swift inroad of the fell disease that was eating his life out, gladdened with a flush of health as his eyes fell on them.

A quiet but meaning look from him to the girls, when the usual salutations were over, caused them to withdraw, and the four were left alone.

"I am sorry to see you so weak, Harry ; but I hope," said the music-maker, cheerfully, "you'll soon be better an' stronger."

"I'll never be better," said the youth with an attempt at firmness. "Whoever struck the blow accomplished his end."

"You'll get over it ; never fear."

"No. It broke my life. I feel it. I am gone here." He placed his hand on his breast. "I am sorry for it, not for myself, but because of any good I might do for the suffering people around."

"There was no account of who done it?" asked the music-maker.

"No. How could there? I was knocked senseless. Indeed to this moment I don't know how I came here. But even if it were known—what use? It could not be recalled ; my broken life could not be restored."

"The worse luck for us all," said Darby Kelly—in deep sorrow.

"It may be all for the best," said the Prophet resignedly,—"who knows? But about Kevin, boys?"

"'Twas about that we kem to spake to you," said the music-maker.

"I thought as much when I saw you come in. I expected you before now."

"It would be so dangerous to come in the daylight, or earlier in the night," said Darby Kelly apologetically.

"And might undo any good we have in our heads to do," said Charley in the same strain.

"It might, but they'll hardly think it worth their while to watch the place now. Have you thought of any plan?"

You know Kevin mustn't—nothing must be allowed to happen him."

He was about to say "mustn't die," but he shrank from using the word.

"We have not been able to sthrek^a out a plan," said Darby Kelly, "there's hands enough to do whatever is wanted—men that won't shrink from anything that's put afore 'em—but we don't know what to put afore 'em ; that's a fact."

"That's the way it's with us, Harry," interposed Charley. "If we only knew what's to be done it would be aisy enough to do it. But what *is* to be done?"

"I suppose, boys," said the Prophet, sinking his already weak voice still lower lest his words might reach the anxious hearts around the kitchen fire, "there's not a doubt but that he will be convicted?"

"Not the laste," said Darby Kelly. "Innocent or guilty, they'll convict him."

"And we all know what is likely to follow that," said the prophet with a deep sigh. "What should—what can—be done?"

Many propositions were put forward in their whispered conversation, but all had an element of impossibility or useless recklessness in them that caused their rejection.

"It will be late when the trial is over," said Harry Canavan, at last, when the men had come to the end of their tether with their proposals.

"It will—dusk anyway."

"They'll bring him as they brought him before, back and forward in their prison-carriage," continued he. "I know it well. I saw him in it before. He must be taken from that."

"Ay ; but how ?" inquired all three together.

"There will be the usual accompaniment of soldiers—horsemen. Before I was hurt I was reading in the Greek an account of a battle between the Spartans and the Athenians, where the latter overthrew and defeated the former by placing thin strands of wire, so thin as not to be observable, before their horses' feet in the charge. The Spartan horsemen fell, and squadron after squadron coming after, all were heaped in confusion, and fell an easy prey to the enemy's archers."

A violent fit of coughing interrupted the speaker's anecdote.

"Well, Harry," broke in Charley, impatiently, when the fit was over, "how does that help us out? I don't see that that is much of a guide to us as to what to do."

"You must put that stratagem into practice," said the invalid. "I can't tell you how—but you must. On their return. In the confusion of the fallen horsemen you must have ready hands to tear open the carriage door, and rescue the prisoner. That's all."

"I believe you're right," said the music-maker, drawing a long breath.

"It's the only way—and you must carry it out. A bold attempt is always the best—provided there's a chance at all. And now good night, boys, for I feel very weak, and am not able to talk much. I feel very ill."

"Good night—good night, Harry. I hope you'll soon be better." And they rose to depart.

"Stay a moment. Don't say anything of this to the girls as you go out. It would only add another item of terror and suspense to their torments."

"All right, Harry ; never fear. Good night."

With a short but cheerful farewell to the girls, they passed out into the night and were gone. The latter returned and resuming their places, talked in sorrowful whispers over the coming day until the morning beams began to creep in through the window—the Prophet, throwing such hope as he could on their troubled hearts, dozed off asleep.



CHAPTER XXVI.

IN PRISON AGAIN.

THE prison-gates had closed behind Kevin, shutting out from him all further hope. Even if he were declared innocent of this crime—and looking back on past events, he had not much hope of it—there remained the fact that he was an escaped convict, and bound by the mere fact of his re-arrest to work out his original sentence.

What a succession of hideous pictures passed through his mind the day that first saw him immured, it would be difficult to pourtray.

It was warm, intensely warm, and the heated air penetrated to the closed-up room wherein he was confined. It seemed indeed as if the burning mansion had given an additional glow of heat to the atmosphere this autumn day, for the air that came in through barred aperture overhead—the only entrance for light and air there was—was tropical in its warmth.

He sat on the side of the bed drowsily thinking. They

had retired late the previous night at Orchard Cottage and he had been aroused shortly after by the footsteps of those hurrying to the scene of conflagration. It was therefore with senses dulled by want of sleep that he looked back on the events of the past twelve months.

The morning of the departure from the English convict prison came up dreamily.

He was walking along on the way to Plymouth—prisoners beside him—prisoners before him—prisoners behind him. Loomed up before them the multitudinous lights of the city! Lights here, lights there, lights everywhere. Brightest of all a light which changed all at once into Maury's eyes—and she and he and the haunted convict, were all together on the deck of the convict ship—in the little boarding house on the Garronese coast; windows lined with roses looking out on the white strand over which the breaking waves sunnily rippled until they washed up to the door of Orchard Cottage, or to his uncle's house in Paris, where the English doctor, Sir Hardinge, and Rupert Clarendon had just set fire to the city, and the flames were extending over the water to where himself and the haunted convict were a-beating forward on the waves towards the East. The flames were coming with great rapidity towards them, and they should be shortly—that portion of them above the water—burned into cinders. Horrible!

Kevin caught himself as he was nodding forward—falling.

To keep himself awake he thought again of Maury; and to brighten his weary heart, over which sombre dream shadows were falling.

Again: Maury's bright eyes and laughing face, looking

down at him from the barred window overhead, suddenly replaced by dark and sinister eyes looking down at Convict No. 37, out of the gloom of unknown darkness, extending into soundless depths, unlit save where the burning mansion flings its red light streaking the blackness with bright shadows showing in relief the prison yard with manacles hanging against the wall. The blacksmith, too—he was there! What was he doing with that hammer of his? Fastening the chains upon the wrist and arms of the English doctor in the streets of Paris, under the shadow of the lamp in that narrow laneway of a street, whose end is nowhere but the Morgue. Ah! the Morgue. How it comes near or does he come near it? What form is that lying on its sloping slabs? What! Heavens!—It is Rupert Clarendon. Morgue, and Paris, and blacksmith shift suddenly, and Norah and he are standing within the little parlour of their house at Carrigbrae, enveloped in flames. Flames leap in through the window, leap upward from the thatch—quiver and twist, and wind and wreath around them with the convulsion of ten thousand snakes! Horrible! What is to be done? Write to Rupert Clarendon, tossing on the broken mast, miles out to sea, now high on the toppling wave, now descending on its reeling sides, now labouring in the trough of the roaring sea. Heavens! how it does howl! and how the hurricane sweeps the crest off the waves over his head, and how hard it is to find one's steady footing on the yielding rope. Send for Rupert Clarendon to come with sweeping sword and gold epaulets to shear the heads of those fiery flames, snakes, blacksmiths, that are trying to forge the links—horrid links these!—hammered with clank of iron and—

He awoke again as he was falling forward—dozing. Dreaming in waking sleep, in the slumberous heat and drowsiness of a hot harvest day.

How these hammerings and clankings of the prison blacksmith rang in his ears!—or was it someone unlocking the door?

Yes, it was the latter; for presently the lock, after some groping thereat, turned rustily; the barred door swung open, and enters Rupert Clarendon!

Rupert Clarendon, lying in the wine-shop in the *Rue de Bonnett Rouge* at Paris, insensible, gendarme's lantern throwing its bull-eye's rays on his pallid face——

"I must apologise for my intrusion," a friendly voice said, effectually dispersing Kevin's dreaming fancies, and recalling him to wakefulness and reality.

"Oh, is it you, Mr. Clarendon?"

"Yes; I could not rest until I saw you—until I spoke with you alone. And first permit me to tell you how sorry—how extremely sorry I am that it was my unfortunate fate to have a share in the transaction of this morning"; thus Rupert, with every indication of sincerity in his voice.

"It is not necessary. It was my own fault—it was my own imprudence in coming back to——"

"I received so much kindness," broke in Rupert, impatient to put himself straight with his prisoner, "I received so much hospitality; I spent so many pleasant hours in Orchard Cottage that it seems to me like an act of savage ingratitude to have, even in the discharge of my duty, been an accessory to bringing such sorrow under its roof to-day."

"I attach no blame to you. I should have acted similarly in your place ; it was unavoidable."

"It was ; but that does not alter the pain I feel. I—I—should never have been placed in a position where this would form part of my duty," added he bitterly.

There was a pause—an awkward pause—for Kevin did not see what reply or observation to make.

"I did not intrude myself on you so much to tell you that as to say that I shall do everything in my power to serve you—and thereby atone for the unintentional sorrow I have wrought. And in what I have now to say you will consider me as your friend, and in no other light? You will promise me that?"

Kevin nodded his ready acquiescence. He had heard from his sister and Maury and Joe enough to fully inform him of the frank and chivalrous character of the young officer.

"In the first place it is necessary to tell you that an information has been sworn that yours was the hand that fired Grangemore Castle. That is not true—of course?"

"It is not," said Kevin calmly—under other circumstances the news would have startled him ; but he was weary and leaden-nerved and tired nature refused to give him the necessary strength for surprise. "It is not. I know nothing whatever of it. I was coming back from viewing the burning, like many others, when I was arrested. Who made the information?"

"It is signed Keliff M'Nab. I believe he is, or was, the steward."

"I know him. It was he who swore against me before."

"So I have heard. And wrongly then too?"

"There was not a word of truth in what he said ; not one. I had nothing to do with what I was convicted of. I never belonged to any secret society. I don't think there was one in existence in this county."

"What was his object ? "

"I don't know. I believe it was to lay hold of our farm. I believe it was to get rid of one who might—and God knows would !—be a barrier in his path, and so make the way easier to effect his object."

"It was a desirable farm ? "

"A hundred and twenty acres," said Kevin, with a sigh. "It had once been barren land enough, I heard the old people say, but generations of careful tillage and cultivation had made it the best in the county. The worse luck for me."

"It was that he wanted ? "

"I suppose it was. It did not much matter to me what his motive was," said Kevin wearily. "I suffered for it, and I suppose I'll suffer for it again."

"Why that would be infamous ! An innocent man to suffer transportation ! Horrible—Impossible ! "

"It is possible enough," said Kevin with a faint smile. "Six months in the horrors of an English prison makes it real enough—at least I should think so."

"But surely his uncorroborated word will not be taken as sufficient evidence ? " said Rupert indignantly.

Kevin shook his head.

"You don't know Ireland," said he, "anything will convict a man—when they want to get rid of him. His oath was taken *then*. It will be taken *now*. See, if it don't ! Who is to contradict him ? ' Norah and Maury. Who will

listen to them? No one. At least, no one sitting on the bench. That's how it is. Sure as fate."

"It mustn't be," said Rupert warmly. "It would be a sin crying to heaven for vengeance."

"If it would, there have been a great many crying to heaven even within my own short memory. But they have cried in vain."

"Not for ever—nor for long," said the officer confidently, "I don't believe that such a state of things can exist for any length of time. It would be a scandal in the face of day."

"It has existed long enough to whiten many a young man's head in the dungeon-cell, or to turn his brain," said Kevin, his thoughts referring to Convict No. 37, "and to send many an innocent man dangling from the scaffold high."

"At any rate," said the officer cheerfully, rising to take his leave, "it shall not be in the future. At least not if I can help it—and I think I can. Keep your heart up—do not be cast down!—and trust me as a friend who will not forget kindnesses received."

With a warm shake hands he left the cell, and Kevin, when he was alone, lay back thinking. A more comfortable feeling had grown up in his breast; and with a vision of Maury rising before him, with her fair face and eyes of laughing blue, soon was sound asleep.

There was but little time for Rupert wherein to make efforts for the safety of his prisoner, for the assizes were coming on within a few days—before which Kevin should be put on his trial. But shut off as he was from intercourse with the people by reason of his position, his efforts were limited, and, indeed, for the most part aimless.

He could, if he had good grounds for it, have used high influence with the governing body in England, on his behalf ; but what grounds had he to go upon ? None. None, except his own beliefs ; but beliefs tell for little in a case of such magnitude.

Rupert indeed knew—knew quite as well as that the sun had risen that morning without his having witnessed it—that Kevin was innocent. Believed, moreover, that the Scotch steward was at the bottom of all the mischief that was occurring—had heard indeed from his own lips, in conversation with Sir Hardinge, that it was he that had foully sworn away Kevin's liberty on the occasion of his first conviction.

But he well knew that his uncorroborated word would avail but little—would avail nothing at all, in fact, against the first conviction, which was finally settled by the judge's fiat. Even if he were to tell what he had heard, how would it look in a public court—his revealing the substance of conversation accidentally heard, and in a place where he was enjoying all the hospitalities that could be offered ? Notwithstanding his desire to befriend the prisoner, his soul shrank from the idea of, for any reason, acting so dishonourable a part. It could not be done.

What *was* to be done ? For the day of trial was rapidly approaching, and from all he could glean in the society in which he was thrown, the prisoner's guilt was a foregone conclusion. The crime was of too enormous a character—too alarming in its very magnitude—not to make a summary example necessary.

The country was disturbed—very much disturbed ; the numerous families evicted, not only from Sir Hardinge's property, but from those of many others in the county, had

resolutely refused to enter the workhouse, so kindly prepared for them ; had preferred to wander about the country, living heaven knows how—but any way they could ; and helplessly resolved to die—when death came—in the ditch near their homes rather than in the paupers' bastille.

Poor and helpless and starving they were, in the midst of lands teeming with fertility—but, for all their wretched condition, a secret terror to the great magnates of the county ! The burning of Grangemore Castle had brought home to these latter, palpably and forcibly, a sense of danger that often kept them sleepless at night ; and in their blind terror the prisoner had about as much chance of escape as a man flung into a den of ravening lions.

All this Rupert knew, but the knowledge only added to his torment and anxiety. Whom could he consult ? No one. In the circle in which he moved it was useless to expect a sympathiser with his sufferings. Even Colonel Montfort, usually so generous and kind-hearted, was not to be approached under the circumstances.

Rupert was in despair. When he thought of the sorrow which must have fallen on that quiet home at the Orchard—when he thought of the hopeless anguish into which the two young girls were so suddenly thrown—a pang of fire shot through his heart, as if a searing iron had been applied thereto.

But not all his sufferings or his terrors could prevent the passage of time—could prevent the approach of the day when the prisoner should be set on his trial.

And so the time passed—the days and the hours—each wringing his heart with despair as his utter powerlessness became evident to him, until the day of trial arrived.

A gloomy day it was that ushered in the opening of the assizes. As if in unison with the clouded apprehensions that gathered over the minds of the tenantry—who looked up to this as a test case of what was likely to befall themselves at some not distant day—the morning broke with a storm of rain and wind. From the west a gale came, laden with a mist thick and grey, that swept over the Shannon and across the bogs, and through the streets with depressing effect. For weeks the weather had been of the finest, and it did seem as if an evil bodement for the prisoner that on this eventful day it should break with such outcome of wind and storm.

From early morning the people came gathering into the town. From near and far, for the story of the burning had spread widely, and with it the story of the returned convict. As with all people long resident in the country, Kevin's relations were numerous for miles around Carrigbrae; and more or less of romance attached to his escape. Naturally intense interest attached to his trial, for—naturally also—none believed him guilty. Whosoever had done the burning, not one thought the hand was his—but even so none entertained a doubt that he would be convicted; but with one belief or the other on their minds, the country people came thronging in until the streets were densely crowded.

Eleven o'clock came, and amid a whirl of cavalry with swords drawn, the carriage of the judge swept forward to the courthouse. The doors were thrown open, and in a moment every available spot was occupied.

The judge took his seat, the various counsel arranged themselves before him, and the prisoner was ushered into the dock.

Very cool, calm, and collected, Kevin appeared before the assembled sea of faces that turned towards him. He had passed through too much trouble within the past six months to feel excited or terrified now. Whatever despondency or weariness there had been on his face previously, changed into a bright smile as his eye fell on some well-known face in the crowd. There was no sign of bravado ; but, on the other hand, there was no indication of depression or despair. If heart-sinking there were—and well there might be—he kept all evidences from his features, and met the eyes that were bent upon him with a brave frank placidity that won upon the hearts of most of those present.

The prosecuting counsel opened the case after the usual fashion. He commenced with a long eulogy on the energy and improving spirit displayed by the landowners of Westmeath—dwelt on the necessity of law and order being upheld in the land—grew eloquent on the dreadful outrage committed in the burning of Grangemore Castle, a mansion that was an adornment to Westmeath and to Ireland, counsel said—and finally, narrowing down to the issue before him, proceeded to point out the person—the prisoner in the dock—to whom all the circumstances of the case pointed as the guilty man. Murder would out, counsel said, and so also would the crime of arson. For the latter included the former in many cases, though providentially not in this.

Providence had so ordered it that the perpetrator of this hideous crime had been discovered in the very act of its accomplishment. There was a witness to the foul deed, else possibly murder would have been included in the charge, not the murder of one but of several ; for if the inmates had not been awakened by the same man who witnessed

the deed, the whole household would have been consumed in the flames.

Long and eloquently counsel dwelt on the black-heartedness of the villain who could thus doom to such dreadful death a whole household, young and old, male and female. It was manifest, indeed, judging by the faces of the gentlemen sitting with the judge on the bench and in the jury-box that his denunciations found a strong echo in their hearts.

And when, winding up his eloquent peroration, he called his witness on the table, a hushed breathing through the court proclaimed more earnestly than words the conviction of all present that the prisoner was doomed.

With cool unconcern the steward stepped on to the green cloth. With readiness enough of utterance he detailed how he had seen the prisoner at the bar enter the barn after having emerged stealthily from one of the basement windows of the house. How he had hurriedly dressed himself, but before he had time to make his way to the place dense volumes of flames and smoke were issuing from the lower windows of the mansion, as well as from the ricks of hay in the haggard and the masses of hay and straw piled up in the out-offices. How, in the excitement and confusion of the moment, he had lost sight of him, and it was only when he was endeavouring to awake the sleeping inmates he perceived by the light of the blazing haggard the prisoner running swiftly away.

The prisoner turned pale—deadly pale—notwithstanding his assumed composure, as he heard this tale narrated.

Convincing proof, if proof were needed of his guiltiness! So thought the assembled gentry—and the judge. Pale with affright and horror at the perjury so glibly displayed by

the steward, thought his friends as they scanned his countenance.

There was no shaking the evidence of the Scotchman. Perfectly composed, he stood to his accusations, and with a firmness and clearness that manifestly prevailed with the jury and with the judge, retailed over again in answer to the questions of the opposing counsel the circumstances of the burning, and of his having seen the prisoner at the times and places mentioned.

As he descended from the table, a low murmur ran through the crowded court. It might have been caused by the feeling palpable enough amongst them, that his evidence had sealed the doom of the youth standing in the dock. Or it might have been caused by a sense of the belief that he had sworn away an innocent man's life. For, notwithstanding that his words carried conviction to the minds of jurymen, gentry, and judge, the crowding country people, with an innate sense of what was true, still stubbornly refused to believe the prisoner guilty.

In the midst of which, however, Maury was called, and ascended the table.

With trembling lips and pallid face—very different now in its colour from the morning when Rupert Clarendon was attracted by its laughing winsomeness as she stood at the brook by the bridge—Maury told her story. How Kevin had been but a few days returned ; how he had not stirred out that night or indeed any other night since he came back, and had only been awakened by the hurrying feet of those rushing to the great conflagration, towards which he had himself gone shortly after. Ending which evidence, indeed, before prosecuting counsel had time to cross-examine her, by

swooning away in the witness-chair, from which she was quickly carried out into the open air.

A hush of bated breaths—an electric thrill, such as comes over groups of men in moments of great excitement—a sudden restless stir of all—and a sudden settling into complete repose—swept over the court-house as Norah ascended the table and withdrew, with gentle hand, her veil from her face.

A look of intense astonishment and surprise, a drawing together of the forms on the bench, and a rubbing of spectacles, the better to take a look at the features that displayed themselves before them betokened the interest which her presence excited among the gentlemen assembled there. Her appearance came with surprise upon them, and for a moment they could hardly realize what brought such a face and such a figure and such entrancing grace before them. It was the highest testimony—unintended and perfectly spontaneous—that could be offered of her singular attractiveness, coming, as it did, from a nest of her brother's and her countrymen's malignant foes.

But her presence there raised the hearts of the other spectators, for hours bent down with gloomiest anticipations. She seemed to them, in her peerless beauty, as a queen of their race, whom none of their rulers and enemies and tyrants could match or equal. It was as to say:—"There she is—one of our own race and blood—born and reared like ourselves. See what one of you with your blue blood and all the rest can match her! Oh! masters, show us one like her. Out of your castles and your mansions and your drawing-rooms let us see her equal!"

An undiademed queen of beauty and peerless grace!

Her very presence lifted hearts that were crushed and hopeless into chivalric bravery and devotion, and infused a new life and spirit into the throbbing breasts of her admiring countrymen.

Norah's story, like Maury's, was easily told and of a similar nature. Kevin had not been out that night, nor during the short time that had elapsed since his return. Could not have been without her knowledge, considering that he slept in an inner room. And, in short, Maury's evidence over again, but rendered in tones that soft and low, came with silvery sound on the listening ears of the crowded court. Her words, gentle but distinct, came like strange music on the silent space around—silent, save the bated breaths of those that hung upon her every word.

She was not cross-examined. The opposing counsel, knowing well how vain for good her words were—and, perhaps, with unwithholdable compliment to her appearance—declined to do so. And, as she rose to leave the witness-box—perhaps in unwithholdable compliment also—the judge and the gentlemen on the bench rose from their seats.

The crowding spectators swayed and moved restlessly as their breaths came and went in hurried suspiration, and, for a moment, the air of the court seemed electrical as a ringing, enthusiastic, and defiant cheer seemed on the verge of utterance. But it came not. Nevertheless, so strained were men's feelings at the moment, that had the roof trembled to the ringing echoes, the cheer could not more palpably have been in men's ears.

It was late when counsels' speeches were over for defence and in rebutting, longer still until the judge's charge came to be delivered.

When it was concluded, none needed to say how the verdict would be given. Property should be rendered secure though a hundred men died. Even if they were innocent—and were hung unjustly—it would be doing good. It would be rendering life and property safe—a sort of *manes* offer to the legal comity of the law. It would be something in the nature of the contingency that prompts a general to sacrifice a regiment of dragoons and a battery of artillery in order that his main body may retreat under cover and with safety; or, a squadron of cavalry in a reconnoissance. So the judge and jurymen and magnates assembled looked upon it.

But so did not look upon it the men of Westmeath crowding the court. As the judge assumed the black cap, the feeling of suspense and dread foreboding that had previously held possession of them vanished. The worst was known, and with that singularity which belongs to human nature, no sooner was it so than men's spirits rose and all previous downheartedness was swept away. A sense of defiance and determination reigned instead!

The sentence pronounced—it was in the times when arson with many lesser crimes was awarded the death penalty—the crowd passed out of the court-house, the judge and gentry left the bench and passed into the disrobing-room; and amid the moans of women and imprecations of the men, the carriage in which the prisoner was seated swept on from the court-house to the jail, horsemen with naked swords uplifted before, horsemen beside, horsemen behind, horsemen everywhere!

Woe! for the prisoner fettered in between these naked sabres!—encompassed by this ring of steel!

“Ah, the poor boy!—to die on the gallows so young—oh, God!—an’ so innocent!” burst in cries from the hooded women as the cold steel flash their glints athrough the dusky evening. “*Aroon!—aroon!*—Was it for this his mother bore him? Was it for this God gave him the fair face an’ the manly form? Mavron! Will God never look down on this unhappy land!—Oh, Mother of Heaven! who bore the Cross of Crosses once, look in pity on the motherless boy an’ save him!”

Was it that wailing cry—half *caoine*, half prayer—that received speedy answer? Had it time to pierce high heaven and bring down response?

For, of a verity, something strange *was* taking place in that prancing array yonder in the distance; in the streets midway between the court-house and the jail! cries of men in strange discord and yet accord, burst hoarsely forth—cries also and curses of soldiers—clank of steel, of stirrup, of musket and sabre on the stone pavement as of men and horses falling—swaying and hurrying of multitudes—shouted commands of officers—a breaking of glass—and a furious rush past of men and young and old in all directions in panting but objectless speed!

What was it—what was it all?

“Prisoner’s rescued!” hurrying youth shouts, flying with wild haste, in answer to query thus addressed. “Prisoner rescued, and—by the blessin’ ov God—he’ll never be taken!”

Verily such visions of Pandemonium never showed itself in street of Irish town on harvest evening before—with the dusk falling and the stars peeping wonderingly out through the thin white clouds that were scudding across the sky!

Dragoons—Rupert Clarendon at their head—boot and saddle, and burst out from barrack-gates thrown wide open ; women faint or grow hysterical, while men cheer frantically, as if to ease their breasts of the strong excitement that rends them. Oh ! for arms now ! Oh ! for fire-arms ! In such bursts of excitement—when peril and death are forgotten—when the will shows its power over the weakness of flesh and muscle—the deathless deeds of history have been wrought !

But what of Norah ?—when the crowding tumult and uproar burst forth and the hoarse volume of sound concentrates itself into the one cry :

"Prisoner's escaped !"



CHAPTER XXVII.

BACK IN CLARE.

CONVICT No. 37 arrived in Clare in due time. True to the instincts of the Irishman ever, his first visit was to the place where his old home was situated. Alas ! there was no vestige of it remaining. The ground on which it stood, as well as the garden that surrounded it, had been thrown into the adjoining field ; and the ploughshare had many a time, in the ten years he had been absent, passed over it. There was nothing whatever to indicate that a home had ever been there ; that happy hearts had dwelt thereon ; that pleasant faces had gathered beneath a roof-tree there ; that prayers from thankful hearts had ever thence gone up to heaven.

It was in the morning he arrived. The sun was shining

down pleasantly, as it had often done in the olden time ; the country around was rich with the golden promise of the coming harvest ; the sea in the distance lay tranquil and shining. But the returned convict saw none of these beauties of sea or land. His mind carried him back over a decade of years, and he saw, in his imagination, his little home as it was then. He saw himself advancing homewards from his early work to his breakfast, the dear face of his wife at the door, her baby crowing in her arms to welcome his approach. He could, in his dreamy way, see the breakfast laid, the simple adornments of his kitchen glistening on the walls, under the tidy care of his wife—proud of her neatness—and the roses, that opening to the sun, gave out their perfume.

Shaking off the reveries that crowded on him, Phelim awoke to the present circumstances. He heaved a deep sigh for the vanished past, and with slow steps withdrew.

He would have knelt on the place where the hearthstone once was, and have said a prayer thereon, but for two reasons. In the first place, he was afraid that his return might be discovered if his actions became too conspicuous, and, in the second place, at the moment his heart was more inclined for maledictions than prayers. The long days of his imprisonment arose up before him ; the horrors of his prison cell came in all their dread array to his imagination.

To banish them he turned away and with heedless steps wandered towards the shore.

He was pining to see the grave of his wife and child, but who was to show him ? Who could he speak to without danger of detection ? Without at all intending harm to him,

people would talk, the news would spread, and it might, and would reach the ears of those in authority. Lonely and desolate though he was, his short period of freedom had made liberty very dear to him. If only to exist, and wander about in the sunshine—what a Paradise that even was compared with the horrors of the dark prison cell !

Still he must see his wife's grave, and somebody he must ask. But whom ?

Suddenly a thought strikes him, and as it does, he wonders it has not come into his head before. Why not call to the priest—Father Tom ? There, if he were still living, he would find secrecy and information and sympathy. There was no danger of harm coming to him there. None.

With a quick thrill of hope and pleasure through his breast, the convict turned with lighter steps in the direction of the priest's house. It was a long walk ; but in the new-found joy of having struck on a friend, and a sure one, the distance seemed nothing.

Taking the most lonely and isolated ways along the shore, he, after a rapid walk, found himself at the priest's house.

He knocked timidly at the hall-door. There was no response. He knocked a second time, and it was with a throbbing at his heart, that he found himself powerless to control, he heard a footstep approach. He pulled the leaf of his hat over his face in instinctive endeavour to conceal his features.

The door opened, and the well-known features of Father Tom presented themselves. If the ten years passed had much altered the returned man they had not been without change on the priest himself. His hair once black had

grown silver-white ; his form once erect had grown bent, and the once keen and piercing black eyes were now concealed with glasses. All this Phelim Rorke noticed with the first glance.

Father Tom was reading his breviary, and was so absorbed in his prayers that it was purely mechanically he opened the door, and now gazed rather vacantly at the form thereat as if waiting for him to speak. Which Phelim, seeing how matters stood, promptly did.

"I want to speak to your reverence."

"A sick-call?"

"No, your reverence, it isn't. I want to speak to you inside."

"Very well," said Father Tom affably ; "come in."

"Your reverence don't remember me?" said Phelim, as he and the priest stood together in the little parlour.

The priest looked at him keenly, but finally shook his head.

"No, I don't," he said.

"Your reverence might, then," said Phelim somewhat disappointedly. "My name is Rorke—Phelim Rorke. I lived over at the——"

"You're not Phelim Rorke that was—transported?" said Father Tom, with a gleam of recollection flashing asudden across his countenance.

"The very same, your reverence," said Phelim with a strange sense of weakness running through him.

"What! It can't be. Why, so it is! Phelim, my poor fellow, I'm glad to see you again! What brought you here, or how did you come back?"

"It's a long story to tell, your reverence," said Phelim,

with an effort to repress the tears which he felt to be rapidly rising to his eyes, "and may be you wouldn't have time to listen to me."

"Time! I have time enough!" said Father Tom, putting a mark in his breviary to show him where he had left off reading, and closed the book. "I have often thought of you—often prayed for you."

"It's just like your reverence," said Phelim with a strange mist growing before his eyes.

"Yes, the world had sore crosses for you—had many trials for you; but God has His own wise ways for all things. Take a seat, for you look tired and worn. You must take a little refreshment. Bless my soul!" said Father Tom in much astonishment, as he searched in his cupboard for some stimulant for the wayworn visitor—"to think that you should have come back again! Take that—it will do you good. Well, and how did you come back? They let you free, I suppose. Heaven knows!—so they ought."

"They didn't, then, your reverence."

"No!" said Father Tom, with a fresh access of astonishment from a different quarter. "And how did you get free?"

"I'll tell your reverence," said Phelim, proceeding to narrate the circumstances already detailed in these pages.

"Well, Phelim," said the priest, when the narrative was concluded, "that's a very singular story."

"An' true, every word of it, your reverence."

"I am quite sure it is," said Father Tom heartily. "But it is very strange, all the same. God must have some purpose in bringing you back here."

Phelim shook his head.

"I only came back for what I told you."

"That was *your* notion ; but the ways of God are inscrutable. And so you would like to see your wife's grave?"

"I would indeed—if anybody knew where it was."

"I do, Phelim. I helped to bury her. If much sorrow and undeserved suffering lead, as they do, to a better world, I assisted at the burial of a saint. But you shall see it, Phelim—I shall drive you in my trap over there presently."

In a short time the trap was ready, and Father Tom drove him to the graveyard. And there, Father Tom having business elsewhere, left him—kneeling on the green grass below which rested the ashes of his wife and child.

It was dusk by the time he could tear himself away from the place—somehow it seemed to him as if the dead below could hear him, could hear what passionate words of love and sorrow fell from his lips.

The time had come, at any rate, when it was necessary that he should leave. And the next question was where should he go? Kevin had given him his address, but it was a long distance from Clare to Athlone, and Phelim's money was very scanty.

He pondered long what he should do. If he had mentioned the circumstances to Father Tom assistance would have been cordially rendered him. But Phelim would have torn his heart out before mentioning his necessities to the kind old priest—all the more indeed because of his kindness.

Suddenly the thought struck him : That secret find of old that had brought him so much trouble—what if he were to avail himself of it now? He remembered distinctly the

place in which it was—remembered it, as he had said to Kevin Moore, many a time in his lonely cell. He rather feared to go there, but necessity had no law—there was no other way of pursuing his journey.

Thither accordingly he directed his steps.

He had but little difficulty in finding the rath. It lay, like similar places all over Ireland, untouched—as in the night when he last was there. The whin-bushes still covered it, for no hand was sacrilegious enough to disturb the shrubs that covered the ashes of the forgotten dead.

Similarly, he had but little difficulty in finding where, therein, was the place in which he had found the treasure. It was at the root of a thick holly tree. The grass had grown over the place many a time since he by accident had uncovered it, and now clothed it as with a thick carpet of moss.

He tore this up with his hands.

The clinking of coin, as he probed the yielding clay, soon proved to him how true his memory was, and how deeply this incident had ingrained itself on his recollection through all his troubles.

Yes, the gold was there—still undiscovered and untouched !

He gathered carefully a quantity of the coins, and filled one pocket with them. Then he carefully covered it up again, replaced the grass as carefully as he could, and rose to leave ; not without a curious feeling of apprehension that made his heart violently palpitate.

What had brought the treasure there ? What hurrying hand, in the days when fire and sword wrought ruin and havoc over the land, had hidden it there for security until

the wave of war and rapine had passed? What had become of the hand that hid it, and that never came back to look for the lost gold? Had raiding sword of the robber-foeman smote him down, and ended at once the thread of his life and all knowledge of his secret? Or, mayhap, plundering hand had hidden the gold there, and swift retribution following had left his treasure, for ever more to him valueless.

It was whilst Phelim, hurrying through the bushes of the rath, pondered over these things, that he became suddenly aware that—*there was somebody walking beside him!*

The blood rushed back into his heart. A cold thrill like the rush of ice-water down his back seized him. The old terrors of his convict life were upon him again with accumulated force! A paralysis of fear surged through his brain, rendering him almost unconscious of thought.

Since his liberation from convict-life, by the shipwreck, he had been entirely free from these visitations. It did seem as if, in the glory of God's sunlight and freedom, he was in the future to be free from the horrors that haunted him in the darkness of the prison—as if they and liberty were incompatible.

But here now they were again around him!

With a shuddering nameless fear over him, which he was wholly unable to even attempt to strive against, he walked along, unconscious of what he was doing; but keeping his head averted from the object at his side.

But step for step beside him—he knew it well, though he saw it not, and though no rustle followed its movements—the silent companion kept pace with him. If he walked slowly it walked slowly—if, in breathless terror, he

quicken his pace it was still beside him. There seemed to be no escape—no possible chance of avoiding it. More than that, he felt by some certain sense within him, that the ghostly partner of his walk knew what he was even thinking of!

He had never looked in the direction of the shadow, or whatever it was, that moved at his side. Nor could he do so if all the world were to be reward of the effort!

Mile after mile—he knew not how many—he had no thought of time or space, or no power of thinking thereof—he travelled over the moorlands that stretched along the sea.

Every step was laden with terrors. Whatever agony he suffered in prison was added to an hundred-fold as the noiseless form beside him kept pace with him, moving as he moved, hurrying as he hurried, halting as he halted in the uncertain footing of the swampy low-lands.

Such night of terrors seldom man passed before!

Bodily pain the will can sometimes overcome; even, if otherwise, the dulled senses become accustomed to it; and at the worst there are moments of relaxation from even the most intense.

But no sense of relief came—or could come—to the increasing fears that grew with every step he moved.

Was this the same visitant that, passing through bolt and bar and fastened door, stood beside him in the darkness of the prison-cell?

That one talked—spoke to him; this one moved silently beside him.

Oh! terror unutterable!

He was weary with walking, yet still, with eyes averted,

he moved on. The perspiration had burst through every pore of his body ; had dried ; had burst forth again with a fresh accession of insupportable—of supernatural—fear !

Would his agony never end ?

A light shone on his gaze—a faint light ; and presently a building formed itself to his eyes out of the gloom.

He knew it well—knew it from its cruciform shape and the sign that surmounted the gable-end.

It was a building that in the evil days of the penal laws—and the not less evil days of antiquated bigotry in those remote districts—could be only erected in some waste place, in some no-man's land. It was the chapel.

Some sense of succour came to him. The light shining in the humble thatched edifice, was the lamp burning in the Sanctuary before the altar !

As if the silent being at his side knew what thought possessed him, it moved closer to him !

He could almost feel its impalpable touch at his elbow !

He was passing by the opened door. Some ceremony had been going on, now over, and the building though still unclosed, was apparently empty. ,

He turned sharply—to go in.

It was his only chance for safety, relief, and succour !

At the moment he felt himself seized by something that, as it touched his neck, seemed to burn him. A hot burning breath was on his face ! The clutch seemed to rend his frame !

It was like no touch of earthly thing !

With a cry of mortal fear, with a strength rendered supernatural by this fresh accession of terror, in a frenzy of overpowering agony, he burst from the thing that clutched

him, and flew into the little church ! It seemed to him as if a shriek of unearthly rage and despair rang through the building from the door as, guided by the light of the pale lamp dimly burning in the Sanctuary, he flew in that direction.

A statue stood at one side of the carpeted altar—shining whitely in the gloom.

"Oh ! Comfortress of the afflicted !"

He threw himself before it, clasped one arm around it ; and, his strength now wholly given way, whilst the big drops of perspiration burst from his forehead, fell senseless beside it !



CHAPTER XXVIII.

WHAT THE SHANNON BORE.

WHEN Phelim awoke the sun was streaming in through the chancel windows. The noise of the key turning in the doors fell on his ears. Then he knew that, whilst he lay there unconscious in the gloom, the chapel doors had been closed, and that he had lain alone all through the night.

But what a blessed sense of relief and happiness seemed within him as he raised himself from where he lay ! What a consciousness that the days of his mental torture and suffering were over !

Plainly, as if he saw it written on the walls around him, he knew that his respite from the bad past had come. How or wherefore he knew it, it was beyond his power to tell ; but knew it he did—and for a certainty.

What had happened him whilst he lay unconscious, from whence had the succour come—who knows?

There are more things in heaven and on earth than are dreamt of in philosophy. It were but poor existence this of ours if the wonderful works of the Unknown were bounded by man's limited knowledge.

But so it was, at any rate, be the explanation what it may, that the load of terror was removed from the soul of the afflicted man, and the light of happiness came there instead.

He hid himself in a corner of the church, whilst the attendant was opening the door, and remained unobserved. Then he knew by the gathering of the people, and the preparations at the altar, that Mass was going to be said! And then he suddenly remembered that it was one of the holidays of the year.

It was the first time he had assisted at Mass during ten long years.

He was not, to look at—even unarrayed in convict dress—a very dignified personage, nor was the edifice itself, with its thatched roof and clay floor, a very gorgeous temple; but I doubt if from the very finest people kneeling at the same moment in the basilica of St. Peter's in Rome, more fervent or more acceptable prayers of thanksgiving went up to the High Throne above. Indeed, as elegant apparel and cultivated accents don't tell for much in that connexion, it is hardly presumptuous to say there did not.

Mass over, and the people departing, Phelim rose from his knees and departed with them.

Making his way by one conveyance or another, he finally found himself the next evening on board the boat that went

along the Shannon to Athlone. Not caring, however, to face all at once the crowds likely to await the advent of the boat there, he got off at a little landing-place, some few miles lower down, intending to strike inland when it grew dusk. Kevin Moore had told him where he should likely be found, what distance he lived from Athlone, and in what direction ; and Phelim had little doubt that he should readily find his way there.

Accordingly he left the boat, and in the mellow warmth of the summer evening strolled along the banks of the river, until dusk would permit of his proceeding unobserved to his destination. For still, the vague fear of detection was present to him.

Tired with his unceasing journeying, he selected a spot where a barrier of stones went out some distance into the river. It was a quiet, solitary place, and he could rest there undisturbed.

He sat himself down, and pulling out a flask with which he had provided himself, and regaling himself therefrom, looked at the river where it ran broken and murmuring against the barrier of stones.

He felt thankful and content. With the certain consciousness—how coming to him he did not know—that he was safe from further evil troublings, he was, though tired and way-worn, light-hearted, and, as a consequence, perhaps, soon dropped off fast asleep.

He awoke quite of a sudden, startled out of his sleep by—he knew not what !

The stars were glimmering in the sky overhead ; the river in the gloom ran musically murmuring against the barrier of rocks ; and the trees overhead hung their branches

in the still night above him. What had woke him? There was something in his ears that had roused him, though he could not remember what it was. He paused a moment to think? What was it?

It was in vain to try to remember. Perhaps some incident of his dreaming brain.

It was late in the night; he could see that by the multitude of stars that shone in the sky overhead; and it was time for him to be going on his journey.

He was sore with travelling and with his rest on the grass; and he was about applying the flask again to his lips, to create a warmth in his frame, when a sound came on his ears—a moan! Then all at once he knew that it was that sound that had awoke him!

He listened again to catch the direction whence it came.

Again it came to him. A faint half moan, half sigh, as of some one dying! It came from the direction of the river—from the barrier of stones that he had noticed before he went to sleep.

Without wasting a moment, he hurried in the direction, but he could see nothing. Whatever it was, it must be further out. Taking off his shoes that he might not slip on the dank moss or the stones, he carefully picked his way outwards to where the current of the river broke strongly against them.

That moan again! Where did it come from?

Looking more intently he noticed a black something lying against the stones, as if flung there by the rushing river.

Taking his careful way thereto, he stooped down. What!

The form of a woman! What brought her there, in the drowning river!

With ready hands he lifted the form, and stepping from stone to stone bore her to the bank.

He felt her pulse. She was not dead—though not very far from it. He poured some drops from his flask between her parted lips—thank God that there was some still left for the purpose!

What was to be done? The creature would die—must die—if she were left there in the cold. Was there no place to which she could be brought?—no one that could afford shelter to a dying person?

Phelim Rorke leaving the senseless woman, ran to the summit of a little hill that lay behind where he had lain. Scanning the neighbourhood for sign of habitation to which he could convey her, he failed to see any. Alas! the clearances had swept houses and families from that neighbourhood and made it a waste whereon naught but cattle lived.

He was in utter despair.

Suddenly a light flashed on his gaze. It came from not a very far distance. Marking the direction with his eye—for the light died as swiftly as it appeared—he sped swiftly forwards. His way led through brake and swamp and brambles, but he kept on undeviatingly. Life was sacred, and he, the runner, had tasted enough of sorrow not to make him feel for the miseries of others.

Finally he came to the house. Much to his surprise he found it to be an uninhabited cabin, in which a log-fire burned. Much to his surprise, also, he saw that the door and doorposts lay across the threshold, as if a struggle had

taken place there. But this occupied his attention but for a moment.

More to the purpose was the fact that there was a fire burning, and that there was plenty of fuel in the place. Throwing on several logs of wood, he went back as quickly as he could to the place where the drowning form lay. He felt her pulse again. Thank God ! there was still life there !

Lifting the form in his arms, lightly and tenderly as he might that of a child, he essayed to bear her to the cottage. He was not very strong, and his life in prison was not calculated to put much muscle in him ; but with the courage and determination there was in him he would have borne the weight had the distance been twice as far. Still it was a great relief when, his dripping burthen still in his arms, he stepped once more over the fallen door, and gained the welcome shelter of the fire.

In the days of old, Phelim, as we have already seen, lived by the sea shore. He was familiar with the means taken for the resuscitation of drowning persons. These now he put into practice ; but, although he had the satisfaction of seeing the pulse grow stronger, there was no sign of returning consciousness. Marvelling much over this unusual feature, he bethought him that there must be something more than mere immersion in the water amiss.

A deep wound in the head explained the matter. She had fallen downwards into the stream, and so had caused the wound.

He was much perplexed what to do. Surgical assistance he knew to be necessary, but how could he go for it and leave the insensible girl there—for with the daylight he

saw she was young, and that her features were, making allowance for circumstances, not at all uncomely.

It was out of the question. He could not leave the dying girl all alone in the doorless cabin. It was impossible.

It was the next day when the patient manifested symptoms of recovery and opened her eyes.

"I hope you are better, my dear?" inquired Phelim with a kindness and tenderness that might have done honour to the chivalry of a Crusader.

"Where am I?"

"You're safe, my dear. Keep quiet and rest yourself. You're in safe hands."

"Where is Keliff?"

"I don't know, my dear," answered Phelim, not knowing what other answer to make, for he noticed a sudden look of terror in her eyes, as she asked the question; "he's not here."

The wandering eyes closed again, and as they did, for a moment Phelim thought they had closed for ever.

But they had not, and some muttering sounds after a time came from her lips. He stooped down to listen.

He started up in astonishment.

"Kevin Moore!—Norah Moore! Good God! How does she happen to know them?—and why does she mention their names?"

He poured a few drops more from his flask between her lips—for, sorely as he needed refreshment himself, he spared it for her.

The stimulant revived her. She opened her eyes again.

"Are you better? Do you feel stronger?"

"I feel better—a little."

"Do you think you could speak without distressing yourself?"

A faint motion of the head indicated assent.

"Take a little drop of this, an' maybe you might. There now!—you're better."

She raised her hand to her head.

"I know, my dear—I know. It's there the harm is. But you'll get better. I am sure you will."

A feeble dissent, with a motion of the head, showed that she, like himself, did not believe in his encouraging words.

"D'ye think you could spake? Because if you could I'd like you to answer me this: You spoke of Kevin Moore just now — What's that? What do you say?"

"Hanged!"

Intently as he listened this was the only word that reached his ears.

"Take your time and rest yourself," said Phelim in a paroxysm of impatience; "what's that you said?"

"He will be hanged." Clearly but faintly.

"Good God! What's that you say? Is it of Kevin Moore you're speaking?"

Another slight motion of the head indicated affirmation.

"Who'll hang him? What'll he be hanged for?"

The only intelligible words that reached his ears were "the — burnin'."

"What burnin'? Good God! Isn't this awful?" cried Phelim in utter dismay, as the girl again closed her eyes. But after a short time she opened them.

"Did he—do any harm?" asked Phelim, anxious to

utilize the uncertain moments of consciousness, to glean the information that he somehow judged was of importance.

"No."

"An, why will they hang him? Is he accused in the wrong?"

"Yes."

"Where is he now?"

The only word that fell on his ear was significant as if she had said a thousand. It was only the one word "Jail."

"The Lord protect us! You don't say that?"

There was no answer.

"He's in jail—an' accused in the wrong of a burnin'. Is that it?" asked Phelim hurriedly, summarizing the information he had gleaned. "Is that it?"

"Yes," very faintly.

"An' you know that it's in the wrong?"

"Yes," more faintly.

"And, maybe, if you had the strength you could prove it—could show that he was innocent?"

"Yes"; this time scarcely audible.

"Merciful Providence!" cried Phelim in dismay, as he looked at the eyes before him, again darkening into unconsciousness, and, with some strange presentment, connected her drowning form in the river with the hinted charge against his friend. "What's to be done? Sure as fate! there's some trouble in store for Kevin. An' this poor thing was dhrowned and murdered—nothing else. See here! my dear," said he, addressing the half conscious girl, "I'm going to Athlone—it can't be very far from this—to get a doctor. I must go—you'll die if I don't. You'll be safe here on this bed of rushes an' heath, till I kum

back. I won't be long. An', plaise God! I'll bring assistance back wid me—don't fear. Good-bye—an' God bless you! I won't be long."

Erecting the fallen door, and placing it for protection in its place, he passed out into the dusky evening.

Swiftly as his feet could carry him he ran along the river-side. He knew Athlone was on the Shannon, and that by keeping to the stream he should reach it.

With a presentment that there was unknown danger occurring to Kevin, and that his safety depended in some way on the recovery of the wounded girl—that the, to him, saving knowledge was in her unconscious brain—he sped along with the speed of startled deer.

Never before did swifter foot pace the moory lands bordering on the Shannon. If he had been flying for his own life he could not have bent himself to the task more determinedly.

Every moment was of what importance he knew not, but in its very vagueness seeming larger and more impressive. One thing was absolutely necessary: medical assistance should be provided for the injured girl before her life ebbed wholly away.

Breathless and perspiring he gained the street of Athlone, what time the clamour was at its height; what time the cry of "Prisoner's escaped!" rang through the streets, and Rupert Clarendon at the head of his dragoons rode out under the barrack archway.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE RESCUE.

WHEN the rescuing hands had surrounded the prison-van, and torn Kevin thereout, the first thing done was to wrap him in a heavy frieze overcoat similar to that worn by Charley, and hurry him through the crowded streets, where in a second or two, and in the all-pervading excitement, his identity was quickly lost.

"Follow me, Kevin, for your life," whispered Charley in his ear.

"Where to, Charley?"

"Never mind," said Charley; "follow me."

And accordingly the rescued prisoner quietly glided after him, unrecognised, through the hurrying crowds.

In pursuance of the plan sketched by the rescuers, and so far carried out, it was determined that the place of his hiding should be in the principal hotel of the town. It was easy enough to effect this, for the proprietor was friendly to the people—among whom his business found its largest *clientele*—and for this latter reason, and for others, was quite ready to fall into plans of the leaders of the newly-formed Society. There was wisdom in the scheme, too, for being the most unlikely place that a fugitive would seek shelter in, it was the last that would be searched. There would, therefore, be time enough to find some means of getting him out of the country. Few would suspect the principal inn as his hiding-place; and it was quite certain that every

hut and cabin in the town and farm-house in the country would be searched before the officers of the law would think of seeking there.

When Charley, therefore, turned into the hotel, pushing its inner glass door before him quietly and collectedly, Kevin caught him by the arm.

"Where are you going, Charley? Surely you are not going in here!"

"Yes, I am," said Charley. "Don't say a word, but follow me. Walk quietly and coolly after me."

They walked slowly and deliberately up the stairs, meeting no servant, for they were all out in the streets watching the curious and inexplicable tumult in the distance; but also meeting no proprietor.

"Where the deuce can he be?" thought Charley in dismay, as he walked up the stairs; "he promised to meet us here."

"Isn't this a strange place to come, Charley?" again whispered Kevin, as the uproar outside fell with renewed force on his ears.

"No; it's the best place—and the safest."

"Here?"

"Yes. We arranged it so. You will be safer here than elsewhere."

"I hope you're right," whispered the late prisoner doubtfully.

"I know I am. But the landlord should be here to meet us—confound him!"

"Did he promise?"

"Yes, he did. And he is absent now when every minute is worth a year. May the devil!——But he will be here

soon, Kevin ; and meantime," said Charley, glancing into a sitting-room, "here's an empty apartment. Step in here, and we can lock the door and wait his return."

Pushing Kevin in before him, he quietly turned the key in the door, and fastened themselves securely therein.

"We're safer here, Kevin ; we couldn't be safer unless——
Hallo ! Who's this ?"

This exclamation was drawn from him, just as he turned to address his friend, after locking the door.

For—unseen, in the recess of the window, and in the heavy curtains that shaded it, a gentleman had been standing gazing out into the street ; and now, attracted by noises in his private sitting-room, he turned round to see who the intruders were.

As he did so his eyes fell on Kevin's face, and Kevin's on his, at one and the same moment.

The latter started back in dismay, cannoning against his companion.

"It isn't possible, I meet you here again," said the strange gentleman, advancing towards Kevin with outstretched hand.

"It is, indeed," said Kevin hurriedly, hesitating to take, under the circumstances, the proffered hand, but finally doing so.

"When did you come here ?"

"Some weeks ago."

"Well, this is certainly wonderful. I did not expect to meet you here."

"When did *you* come?" asked Kevin, to break the awkwardness of the moment, and not clearly knowing what else to say.

"This evening. I have been attached, as Military Doctor, to the regiment here. I have not yet called on the colonel ; but, having just dined, mean now to do so. And what do you here ?"

"This," said Kevin, "is my native place."

"Ah, so I think I remember you telling me."

"I hope you sustained no injury after the night in Paris."

"No. Thanks to you, my good friend, else I should have a different story to tell. But," said he, with a sudden recurrence of thought, "what brought *you* back here? Did you get a release or ——"

The strange gentleman did not finish his query, for at the moment a squadron of dragoons galloped hurriedly through the street outside, the crowds opening and making a lane for them—which incident catching on his attention diverted his thoughts in that direction.

"This seems a rather lively place," said he. "Are Irish towns usually as stormy as this?"

"No," said Kevin, whilst Charley laying his hand on his arm silently warned him to decamp. But the former stood his ground, unheeding of the impatient touch.

"There is something unusual on foot, then?"

"There is."

"What might it be? If Ireland is like this generally, I must say it deserves the rollicking character it has got. What is up now?"

"A prisoner's escaped."

"Escaped!"

"Yes, from the soldiers."

"What was he?"

"A prisoner—sentenced to death!"

"Eh? For what? Murder?"

"No; for ——"

"Who was he?"

"I," said Kevin calmly—whilst his words fell with affright on his companion's ears.

"Kevin," he whispered, "for the love of God follow me. Fly, or you are lost. There is yet time. I shall lock the door, and prevent any one following us!"

But Kevin unheeded his whisper; and declined to move. He felt, and truly, that chance of flight for him was lost.

"You!" cried the stranger in astonishment.

"My old luck has followed me. I was found guilty of what my hands never did," said Kevin hurriedly. "I have been tried and sentenced. I have been rescued, and I am here!"

"This is an awkward business. I am very sorry to hear it—very sorry to see you in this predicament," said the stranger gravely.

"I am in your hands—my life is in your hands," said Kevin in desperation.

"In *my* hands!" said the gentleman, with a quiet smile. "Why should it be in my hands? What have I to do with the matter?"

"As you belong to the army—and ——"

Kevin paused—indeed not knowing what to say.

"If I belong to the Service here," said the gentleman, anxious to remove an impression, which he saw existed on Kevin's mind, "my business is certainly not that of arresting or detecting escaping prisoners—more particularly when that prisoner is one to whom I myself owe my life. I am not a policeman, remember."

"Then you won't ——" Charley was about to break in with a question, but halted after the first words, finding the query he was about to put an awkward one.

"I will not inform on your whereabouts you were about to say. Relieve your mind of that impression. I will not. I am in no way bound to do so. Quite the contrary. I shall be very glad—hearing you say you are innocent, and I am sure your words are true—to see you free. At least, if I cannot aid you, I shall do nothing to prevent it. And now, as this is an awkward meeting, I shall leave. If I can be of service, reckon upon me at any time. I trust we may yet meet under happier circumstances."

Saying which, the prison doctor once more shook hands with his former patient; left the apartment; stayed outside a moment to kindle a light; and then, cigar in mouth, with the easiest *nonchalance* possible, descended the stairs, and passed out into the street on his way to the barracks to report his arrival to the colonel.

But he had scarcely emerged into the street, when a sudden shock dashed not only the cigar from his lips, but the breath nearly out of his body.

"What the devil!—Where are you driving to after this confounded fashion?" exclaimed the doctor, catching hold forcibly, by the collar, of a little man who, with head bent down, had been rushing as fast as he could through the street, perfectly heedless of the crowds thereon, of the clamour or its cause, or of whoso might be in his way—and in consequence of which rather inconsiderate proceeding had come full tilt with his head against the young gentleman's breast with great force. "What in the name of the Furies makes you run in this way?—you confounded fool!"

—at the same time shaking him roughly, and apparently not quite decided whether he should administer him there and then a very proper kicking.

Whatever hesitation he had as to this latter, was quickly put an end to by the precipitate runner himself, who with equal impulsiveness tearing himself free, stepped back a pace or two, and, lifting his head, surveyed the gentleman for a moment.

"Tare an ages! It isn't you that's in it, is it, doctor? No, it can't be! Oh, doctor, honey, 'twas the Lord Himself threw you in my way!"

"I should rather think," said the doctor angrily, for he had been butted against rather severely, "it was the devil threw you in *my* way, my friend. But stay!—who are you that happens to know me?"

"Ah, don't mind that now. You're the very man I want. I was hurryin' for a doctor this minit. Glory be to God! that I kum across you."

"Stay a moment! You're not——"

"Clareman? Indeed I am."

"And so you, too, are here?"

"Ah, doctor, we haven't time to talk about that now; you're wantin' badly."

"Where?"

"About three or four miles from here."

"There or four miles! Nonsense, man; you must get another doctor."

"Faix I won't. Nobody must come but yourself. As I said afore, 'twas God threw you in my way. It's a case of murder, that's what it is."

"Murder!" echoed the doctor.

"That's what it is—murder and dhrownin'."

"What on earth have I to do with that? I don't know anything about the matter. I haven't been quite an hour in Athlone yet."

"Sorra may care! you must come. An' we're waitin' too long as it is."

"But what have I to do with a case of murder or drowning. 'It's the police and the coroner that ——"

"*Hama mon dhoul?*" said Phelim, with great insistence; "no, it's *you* that's wantin'. You can save her life."

"How can I bring the dead to life?"

"Dead! Who said she was dead?"

"Isn't it a case of murder?"

"Tare an ages! to be sure it is."

"And drowning?"

"Ay, it is."

"Then what use could I be—even if I could go, **which** I cannot. I cannot bring the dead to life."

"Blood an ouns! Sure she's not dead."

"Then it isn't a case of murder."

"Sure it's all as one. 'Twould be murder, if I didn't save her."

"I am not clear that I understand you, **even** yet," said the doctor perplexedly and making a movement as if he wanted to sheer off from his new acquaintance.

"Blessed Providence! this is how it is," said Phelim, breathless, afraid he should lose this fortunate chance of finding a doctor. "I am comin' along the banks of the Shannon. I find a woman dhrownin' in the river. I lift her out, and find that she was thrown in with the side of her head broken in. I learn that she can save a prisoner

now in jail. An innocent man. You know him, Convict No. 25."

"No. 25?" said the doctor, recurring to the interview upstairs.

"Ay, she knows he's innocent, and can prove it. 'Twas to keep her from provin' it she was flung in, in my opinion."

"Where is this person?"

"A few miles from here. We'll be no time reachin' it. Do, for God's sake, doctor—come!"

Phelim Rorke, as he saw a softening of the doctor towards him, renewed his entreaties.

"How could we get there?"

"A car will take us in no time."

"Well, I suppose I had better go," said the doctor with no great eagerness. "Her head broken in, you say?"

"Ay, an' it's only the mercy of God if she lives till we get there."

"Well, I have no instruments nor appliances. I see an apothecary's over the way. I shall probably get what I want there. Provide a car as quickly as possible. Here is a sovereign ——"

"I have plenty of money—lots," said Phelim in rare delight at the doctor's acquiescence, and mentally blessing his stars at the fortunate meeting.

And without further ado, he hurried away, before the Englishman had time to take his hand out of his pocket.

"Well, this is a pretty nice experience of Ireland for one afternoon," thought the latter, as with difficulty he made his way through the tumultuous crowds, across the street to the apothecary's shop. "First I met a prisoner under sen-

tence of death, rescued from the law, and apparently brought to the principal establishment in the town as a proper and fitting place to secrete him. Next I am brought—by an escaped convict, too!—to a patient who has been both murdered and drowned at one and the same time. And all this before I am quite an hour in the place! If the rest of my period of service be as lively as this, I shall not die of *ennui* in Ireland at any rate.”

When the doctor had completed his purchase in the shop, and had them parcelled up, he looked towards the door, and saw the uncouth face of Convict No. 37 looking inwards therefrom.

“I see you have made no delay,” said he as he came out. “What’s this you have got on the car?” pointing to a large bundle which was piled up thereon.

“Blankets,” answered Phelim laconically.

“You have your thoughts about you at any rate,” said the doctor admiringly. “Now drive on as quickly as you can, for I want to be back before the barracks close.”

Phelim did not need to be told twice, and conveying the intimation in a whisper to the driver, they took their seats, and as soon as they got free of the crowded streets, drove with great rapidity in the direction of the abandoned cottage.

There was but little spoken on the way.

Phelim Rorke was too busy thinking of the poor girl dying in the hut, and was filled with apprehensions lest she should die before they reached her.

The Englishman, on the other hand, was revolving in his mind the curious fact that here he was, before he had been more than a day in Ireland—and not much more than an hour in Athlone—the centre of some plot of which he knew

nothing other than that there was murder and wrong and mystery in it.

"Well," he thought, "it is a nice beginning—and forced into it almost in spite of myself! I am a consummate fool—that's precisely what I am. However, I shall see the end of it now, as I am here. What an extraordinary land this is! And what an extremely active life my two precious convicts seem to be leading—with the noose almost around their necks. Stay! It's not right to say that, though; they saved my life once—and I owe them both a good turn for it. And—I shall pay it!"

With which resolve, he dismissed all further annoying thoughts of his position; and, letting his eyes fall on the river, now sparkling with the stars that had crept out through the mists on high, wondered how it could look in the daylight, and whether he should, during the autumn days, have good fishing therein.



CHAPTER XXX.

ANOTHER WAIF FROM THE SEA.

COLONEL MONTFORT was sitting in his office in the barrack, weary and disheartened.

In his capacity, as commandant of the garrison, he had made one of the number of magistrates sitting beside the judge during the earlier portion of the trial; but had left when Norah had given her evidence. He had no doubt whatever as to the nature of the verdict that would be

brought in, nor yet as to the sentence that would be passed.

But, withal, he was dissatisfied, uncomfortable and perplexed. There was a vague feeling over him that the youth under trial was innocent. There was an inscrutable air pervading the surroundings that somehow impressed him with the belief that they were incompatible with the guilt of the prisoner.

It might have arisen from the appearance of the latter himself ; it might have arisen from the unusual grace and beauty of the two girls that had come to bear witness to his innocence ; or it might have come from the disbelief in his guilt clearly manifest in the faces of the crowding countrymen : but whatever the reasons that gave birth to it, it was rankling uncomfortably in his heart.

"I am not quite sure," thought the officer, as he made effort to read some military documents placed before him, and failed, "that I have not been assisting at a judicial murder. What would have induced him to burn the mansion at a time when perfect secrecy was essential to his liberty and safety ? He does not look like an incendiary. And then—that sister of his ! To think that she—with her grace, her beauty, her refinement—would come deliberately to forswear herself !—Pshaw ! the thing is impossible ! It's a strange land ! I wish I were out of it. I wish I could exchange to England—to the colonies—anywhere."

The colonel's reflections were suddenly broken in upon by a loud and hurried knocking at the outer door.

Before he had time to call "Come in," the inner door was pushed open, and the sergeant of the guard rushed in breathlessly.

"Colonel Montfort ! there is——"

He paused for want of breath.

"Well? Go on. What's amiss?"

"You must order the troops out."

"The troops out ! For what?"

"There's a disturbance in the streets."

"What sort of a disturbance? Of what nature?"

"The prisoner's been rescued."

"Rescued!" said the Colonel, starting to his feet. "Where?"

"In the streets."

"In the streets!" said the Colonel, bewildered.

"Yes, on the way from the courthouse to the jail."

"By whom?"

"The people."

"Where were the guard?"

"Beaten and disarmed."

"Send Lieutenant Clarendon to me!—quick! And tell the bugler to sound the boot and saddle!"

The Colonel stood for a moment, in utter amazement, at the boldness and effrontery of this attempt. So much so, indeed, that Rupert, who attended immediately, stood for some time before him without arresting his attention.

"You sent for me, sir," he said, finally.

"Oh, this you, Rupert! There is some disturbance in the streets. The guard of soldiers has been attacked, and the prisoner rescued by the mob. Take the dragoons with you at once. Quell the riot, whatever it is; disperse the crowds and retake the prisoner! Use no more force than is necessary; but, if necessary, use your arms—and in any case enforce order. I shall send a regiment of rifles after you. Clear the streets, and retake the prisoner!"

Rupert Clarendon, as much amazed as his Colonel, was the next moment in the saddle, and at the head of the dragoons, flying through the barrack gates and into the streets ; not clearly certain what it was he was called on to do.

But there was no foe to fight. The work had been done and over. Hurrying groups filled the streets, disorderly in their rushings but not riotous. The houses on either side were crowded with people who rushed thereinto, they knew not from what danger ; the overturned van, with its entourage of fallen horses and men, stood in disarray in the street ; but trace of the fugitive there was none ! He had vanished—no one knew where !

It was not easy for horsemen—of all others—to follow and seek him out. They might clear the streets—and did ; the people disappearing rapidly by bye streets and across the fields to their homes, near or afar, or crowding into the taverns and ale houses, which were filled to suffocation ; but what further lay for them to do. It would be absurd for them to gallop along one road when a dozen converged on the town ; equally absurd to follow a road at all, when it was palpable that the rescued prisoner would not follow any beaten track in his efforts to gain shelter.

Wherefore, when the streets were cleared, all signs of disturbance vanished ; and, order so far restored, Rupert rode back with his dragoons to report to the Colonel, and to receive, if need be, further orders.

“Lieutenant Clarendon,” said the Colonel, when Rupert had informed him of the results, “Sir Hardinge has been here with me—so has his lordship, the judge. The law has been most flagrantly set at defiance, and the prisoner rescued by an outrageous, but well conceived and apparently

well-organised, stratagem. He must be recovered at all hazards, and brought back—placed within the bars of the jail again."

"But how?" asked Rupert, who felt hurt and pained at the severe and cold manner and address of the Colonel.

"The prisoner has escaped," said the Colonel severely. "He will—so Sir Hardinge thinks, and so too the judge—endeavour to make for his home. You must go there at once, and if there, seize him."

"I, Colonel Montfort?" said Rupert, in a state of mental agony, as this new feature of the business disclosed itself to him.

"You; and why not, sir?"

"It is hardly soldier's duty this," said Rupert, in despair. "It is policeman's duty."

"It is a soldier's duty to enforce the law of his sovereign, sir," said the Colonel sharply, "and to prevent its being outraged or set at defiance."

"But in this case?"

"Well, in this case?" said the Colonel, as his eyebrows descended in wrath.

"In this instance, Colonel Montfort," said Rupert, with deep embarrassment, "if it be absolutely necessary that——"

"Absolutely necessary, sir," said the Colonel, in unmistakable anger and surprise.

"That this should be done," said Rupert, hurrying to get through what he had to say lest the Colonel should indignantly and abruptly stop him, "I would feel obliged—you would place me under great obligation—if you would appoint another officer in my place."

The Colonel drew himself up in a towering rage.

"Excuse me, Lieutenant Clarendon," said he, quietly, but with a voice thick with suppressed passion, "did I hear you aright?"

"I cannot go—indeed I cannot—Colonel Montfort. My heart, my very nature, rebels against this sort of duty."

"See, sir! this bears out fully what Sir Hardinge has just told me. I am not quite certain at this moment that my proper duty would not be to place you under arrest and have you tried by courtmartial! But ——"

"Colonel Montfort! just hear me—just one word——"

"But I spare you, not for your own sake," said the angry officer, "but for those of your family who have long been friends of mine. Go, sir! and execute your duty! And remember, so long as you are again under my commands! that a soldier's first lesson is obedience—and the second to uphold the laws of his King and country. Go, sir!"

With a sore and distracted heart Rupert passed out from the colonel's presence. His words had stung him, and he knew they were deserved. But what could he do? Was he once more to be the unwilling instrument of bringing sorrow and trouble to these afflicted hearts—was he once more to enter the home, where he had been made so warmly welcome, on this hateful mission?

Truly he would have done anything at the moment to save them from trouble. He would have charged single-handed on a battery of artillery, and died at the cannon's mouth, rather than cause the blue eyes, that had so lately brightened at his coming, further shame; would have suffered any misfortune—but dishonour—rather than undergo the confusion of meeting her reproachful glance in his miserable and hateful quest.

Scarcely knowing what he did, but with a bewildered hope that some accident might happen to him on the way, and so prevent his reaching there, Rupert mounted his horse and, placing himself at the head of his detachment, cantered through the street, and on to the road that led to Carrigbrae.

Never did gallant soldier ride on more hateful errand. With maledictions on the country—the landlords and the tenants alike—and with a pain and confusion and humiliation he had never felt before at his heart and whirling through his brain, he rode on.

Meanwhile the colonel resumed his seat at his table, littered with reports and military documents. But it was out of the question for him to pay any attention to these now. If Rupert's mind was tortured, the colonel's was by no means easy.

During the interview with which Sir Hardinge had favoured him, he had learned a good deal of Rupert's doings which surprised and distressed him. That he—an officer of His Majesty's service—should have been consorting with returned convicts and conspirators shocked him. That he should have become so infatuated about the convict's sister distressed him. That she was beautiful, exquisite—endowed with a grace and winsomeness rarely seen, could not be denied. But to think of their different positions! What would be said of this in England? What would Rupert's aristocratic relations think of it? And what a laxity of rule and command would attach to himself, that these things should have been going on, under his very eyes, and with the cognizance of the whole neighbourhood, without his knowing of it. The whole matter was annoying; and it was not made any pleasanter by this news of the prisoner's

escape. Whilst the colonel would not be sorry—on the contrary, would have been very glad to see him set free—escaping in this manner was not only an outrage on the law, but an offence to himself and to his command. He was therefore determined that no effort should be spared to make him amenable to the law.

In the midst of his annoyances and perplexities a rap came a second time on the door of his office. The colonel had been sitting with his feet towards the fire and his back to the door, and was gazing in disturbed reverie into the fire-gleams, when the knock fell on his ears.

“Some further news about this confounded business,” thought he. Then, aloud, without moving his gaze from the fire—“Well?”

There was no answer to this query, so thinking he had not been heard, he said more loudly and sharply, “Well? what is it?”

Finding no response to this either, he turned round with a blended feeling of anger and surprise—when he suddenly started up.

“Why!—no! it cannot be you!” advancing forward and shaking hands most cordially with the newcomer, who in heavy travelling dress, although it was summer time, stood a little inside the door, the sergeant beside him. A stout low-sized man with a hearty, well-favoured, but weather-beaten face.

“I hardly think it can be you, though,” said the stranger warmly returning the greeting, “if this be the kind of reception you give an old friend. Is this your Irish hospitality?”

“Why, in truth,” said Colonel Montfort, laughing, and in

great delight, "I was wrapped in a reverie and a rather unpleasant one. I little expected to see your welcome face when I looked around. Where did you come from? Have you dropped out of the skies or risen out of the Shannon—or what?"

"Neither—I——"

"Never mind. You can tell me again. Take off that heavy coat. Stay a moment! you had better come to my quarters. We shall have more leisure to talk there. And so you have come to Athlone. Who could have dreamt of seeing you here?"

"Why you don't suppose I sailed across the country. Why shouldn't I turn up here?" said the stranger pleasantly, as he cast his eyes around the colonel's luxurious quarters when they reached there.

"Upon my word, I don't know. Only that you would be the last man—and the most welcome—that I could expect to see here. There! take that arm-chair," said the colonel, as he took forth a decanter and some cigars, "and tell me what blessed angel guided your footsteps in this direction."

"Why, you see," said the stranger, divesting himself of his overcoat, and taking the proffered seat, "I was on my way to Cork to take charge of a new ship there, and remembering that you were in Athlone, thought I would veer to the west and look you up."

"For which a thousand thanks. Try that maraschino—or would you prefer brandy? You sailors like something strong."

"If it's all the same to you, my dear Montfort, I shall take some of your Irish whiskey. I don't think there is anything like it, short of ambrosia."

"All right. Here you are! Cigars, too—strong or mild as you like. And now," said Colonel Montfort, taking an arm-chair opposite and disposing his feet on the fender; as he nipped the end of his cigar, "tell me all the news. Where have you been, and what are you up to? What a long time it is since we sailed to Calcutta together?"

"It is a long time. You seem to have comfortable quarters here," said the stranger, rather digressing, as he looked again around the handsome apartment.

"Better than being at sea?" inquired the colonel, laughing.

"Yes—sometimes. How long have you been here?"

"About three years. And if you believe me, my dear captain, I didn't care how soon I was journeying with you again to India."

"What! and leave all this ease and luxury?"

"Just so," said the colonel; "and leave all this ease and luxury. I was just wishing it, or something of the kind, a few seconds before you came in."

"Place not pleasant?"

"No—not pleasant. Quite the contrary. But I am not going to trouble you with my grievances before you are well seated in my house. Tell me about yourself? Do you like that whiskey, to begin with?"

"It's splendid," said the captain. "It ought to be grand to live in a land where this can be always had in calm or in storm."

"It's one of the few things—the few good things—this blessed country possesses," said Montfort, again laughing.

"What do you do to Cork?"

"To take command of a troop ship."

"Indeed. Going where to?"

"To where you mentioned just now, India."

"I wish to the Lord I was going with you," said the colonel, heartily.

"I wish you were—though, as for me, I should rather have my old ship."

"Why did you select this command? Hadn't you your choice?"

"No."

"No?"

"Why, you see, Montfort, my dear fellow, my last voyage was unfortunate. My ship was wrecked, and I was one of the few—the very few—that escaped with their lives. With nothing *but* their lives."

"Ran on the rocks?"

"Why, no. She foundered in one of the most terrific gales that ever, I do believe, swept the seas."

"You were fortunate to save your life. But you were always too good a fellow to be drowned, Jervis. Ship and cargo lost, I suppose?"

"Both, or nearly so."

"Valuable cargo?"

"Well, it would be difficult to answer that. It might be or it might not, according to the way you look at it."

"What was it?"

"Convicts."

"I beg your pardon! What did you say?"

"Convicts. A cargo of convicts bound for Botany Bay."

"Ah!"

"Yes. So it might or might not be deemed a valuable cargo," said the sea captain gravely, addressing himself to his cigar and the tumbler that stood beside him.

"That's so," said the colonel, drily; "but a rather uncomfortable one in a hurricane. Did all drown?"

"All but two, to whom I owe my life."

"Indeed?"

"Yes. And, by the way, one of the most singular things that ever occurred to me happened there."

"If it is the most singular that ever occurred to you, with your life of adventures, it must be worth telling."

"It is. It is a most unprecedented thing. One of these men was haunted."

"Oh, come, come, Jervis," said Montfort, laughing again very pleasantly, "no Munchausen stories for *me*. Remember I am an old traveller myself."

"It is a fact, I assure you," said the captain gravely. "He was possessed by—or followed by—a spirit, an unseen thing of some kind, who appeared to him and spoke to him."

"Go on," said the colonel drily.

"And from this convict I first learned of the approaching hurricane, else I should not be here to tell you or to enjoy your drink and your cigars—which are both excellent."

"I am delighted you like them. But touching this storm. Would not the barometer have been your best fore-teller on such an occasion?"

"Not quite. The cyclone came of a sudden—in a swoop as it were. The barometer fell so rapidly, in a quiet atmosphere and sky, that we could make nothing of it. He explained it to us. He, through his invisible adviser, told us what it meant, and so gave us the hurried chance we had of preparing for it, else we should have foundered in the first half hour."

"He did, eh? Did he escape?"

"Yes ; and, through his agency, I—I alone—of all the crew and convicts, to the number of hundreds, was saved from the wave and storm."

"Only you and he?"

"And another. Another named Moore ——"

"I beg your pardon ! What name?"

Colonel Montfort was raising the glass of wine to his lips, but as the name fell on his ears he laid it down again with a sudden start, that nearly spilled it on the table.

"What name?"

"Moore!"

"Why, bless my soul ! to be sure ! Now, I remember. How could I have forgotten it ! Well, this is really strange. Tell me the circumstances."

"You seem interested in it, my dear Colonel," said the sailor, addressing himself to the tumbler. "Why?"

"I shall tell you presently. Go on with your story," said the Colonel, with no little earnestness.

"Why, as I said, the storm came on so suddenly that if we had not been forewarned by the convict's statement we should certainly have been caught unprepared. The hurricane was terrific, fearful. Nothing, I do believe, built by the hands of man, could stand that sea and that frightful gale. The vessel finally foundered. I went down with her ; but, coming to the surface, caught and clung to a spar, and so held on. After some hours I was taken on board a floating mast, on which were two of the convicts, the haunted man and—Moore——"

"Yes, go on."

"And drifted with them towards the coast, where we were rescued. Clutched, drowning waifs, from such sea and

storm as never before raged in the Biscay waters. That's all. And now tell me, why are you so much interested?"

"What became of your two convicts?"

"I left them in a village on the Garronese coast. They had worked so bravely and manfully; they had toiled at the pumps all through the dreadful storm with such untiring courage; and they had so providentially saved my life, that I could not do otherwise than see them comfortably provided for before I started for London."

"What became of them finally?"

"I have not the slightest idea, Montfort. How could I? I have never heard or seen of them, as you may readily understand, since.

"I have."

"You?"

"Yes, of one of them at least, Moore."

"Oh, by the way, now I remember. One of them—he, I think—said he was from Ireland. Mentioned, if I remember aright, your name too; but in what connection I forget."

"Likely enough he did. I know, unfortunately, the connection well."

"You say you have seen him since. When?"

"This very day."

"What! He was not foolish enough to return?"

"Indeed he was."

"And got pardoned, I hope? I should like to see him. I am under heavy obligations to him, if my humble life is worth anything."

"I am afraid you are not likely to see him soon, and if you do you will not rejoice at it."

"Why?"

"He was on trial for his life, this day."

"What!" cried the captain with sudden start.

"And convicted!"

"Convicted—you don't——"

"And was rescued this evening——"

"From——"

"From my troops."

"And is now?"

"Is now, my dear Jervis, no one knows where. But, if taken—as he is sure to be—will hang as surely as hemp is spun or timber grows."

"Good God! I am very sorry to hear it. Dreadfully sorry! What was——"

A knocking coming for the third time interrupted the conversation, and the sergeant of the guard, entering and saluting, beckoned the colonel towards him.

A short, whispered and energetic conversation—the purport of which did not reach Captain Jervis's ears, who was much too busy with his own reflections and the tumbler beside him to hearken to it even if it were loud enough for him to hear—took place.

The sergeant left, and the colonel hurried towards his friend.

"Put on your overcoat and come with me, captain. Your friend, the convict—the escaped prisoner—has been recaptured. Come with me!"

CHAPTER XXXI.

BOUND AGAIN.

WHEN the doctor had left the hotel, Kevin and Charley re-locked themselves into the room,

"That was rather a surprise—wasn't it, Kevin?" said the latter, drawing the curtains closely across the window.

"Who was he?"

"The prison doctor."

"Where did you meet him?"

"At Plymouth, afterwards at Paris," said Kevin, proceeding to narrate the circumstances in a few words.

"You can depend upon him?"

"Not to tell?"

"Yes."

"I can, indeed. He has promised, and he would no more break his word, under the circumstances, than you would, Charley. He is the type of an English gentleman, Charley, and that is saying everything. But what are we to do now? Where are we to go?"

"We must wait until the landlord comes. He should have been here long ago. There is some secret place here where he can stow you away until safer times. I wish he were here—confusion to him!"

"I wish he were—heaven knows!"

"If he were only to——. By the way, Kevin, do you feel hungry? I am ravenous."

"Not hungry," said Kevin, "but tired, weak—exhausted! It has been a trying day."

"You might swear that on all the bibles that ever were printed without the least danger of perjuring yourself, Kevin. It was trying enough on me. What must it have been for you?"

"Strange, I did not feel so much until now. My mind was too much engaged to think much of my bodily sufferings. But I do feel weak and fainting almost."

"You look it, too."

"I don't know that I ever felt so thoroughly tired out except the evening we walked into Plymouth."

"Well, Kevin, you must have something to eat, or drink, but how? We cannot ring."

"No, we cannot."

"No. It would be too dangerous. No one must come into the room—else who knows what might happen?"

"Of course," assented the escaped prisoner, as he threw himself wearily into a seat.

"I'll tell you what I'll do, Kevin. It won't take me long to slip down to the bar. No one will see me, or if they do, no one will mind me. I'm in and out here often. I can go the back way. I'll get brandy or whiskey, or drink of some kind, that will keep your strength up until you get something to eat."

"Take care; that might be dangerous," said Kevin, with sudden accession of fear.

"Not at all. Never fear, I'll make it all right. There is greater danger in leaving you in your present weak state, after the excitement and torture of the day, than in descending the stairs."

"Very well. If you think so, do."

"Turn the key in the door until I come. Don't admit

anyone until I come. When you hear three separate knocks, Kevin, open the door, for that will be me."

"All right, Charley; don't be long."

"I won't," said Charley, turning the key noiselessly, "be a minute longer than I can help. There now! lock it after me."

And, so saying, Charley pulled the door after him, and descended the stairs with as little noise as he could. There were quite a number of people about the bar and in the adjoining rooms, as Charley knew by the clamour of voices when he had descended some steps.

"I won't go to the bar," he thought, as he paused on the stairs; "there are so many there I should be known and could not get away easily. I shall go to the kitchen and get one of the servants to get me the drink."

Wherefore, instead of turning into the bar he descended the stairs further and entered the kitchen.

"George," he whispered to a man standing there, with his back turned to him, "bring me in a bottle of brandy from the bar. Here's a sovereign, and be quick, like a good fellow, for —— Hallo! is this you?"

Charley's usually ready composure and self-possession were not proof against the surprise and exceeding start that were occasioned him, when the person addressed turning round to him, disclosed, not the features of the stableman to whom he thought he was speaking, but—the face of the steward at Grangemore!

With a vigorous effort he controlled himself.

"I did not expect to meet you here," he said, hastening to cover by conversation any perturbation that might manifest itself in his manner or looks, "but as we are here

together, what do you say to having something to drink ? "

"If you don't mind drinking with me," said the steward, with the air of one whose presence might not be acceptable.

"Why not ? "

"Because of what I had to swear to-day."

"Oh, nonsense," said Charley, with considerable disturbance of mind, but with great appearance of frankness ; "You couldn't help it, you know."

"No, I couldn't," assented the other humbly.

"And you told nothing but the truth ? "

"No, not a word, upon my ——"

"To be sure. Then, who can blame you ? But I would not remain too long here," added Charley with a happy thought ; "there might be some about who would think differently. What are you going to drink ? "

"A little whiskey. Are you going home ? "

"Not for a little while."

"Because if you were I would go with you."

"I have some calls to make about town—some purchases to make. Take off that drink," added Charley, as one of the servants attended with the refreshment, "for I am in a hurry, and must be off."

"I'll wait for you."

"No—no ; don't. I may be a long time, as I may not be able to suit myself readily in what I want. Besides, I wouldn't stay in the town too long if I were you—there might be some ugly customers from the country about. Good-bye."

"I say," said the steward, detaining him, "was not that a strange thing this evening ? "

"Very ; most extraordinary. Good-bye."

And with a hurried shake hands, as noisome and loathsome to the young fellow as if he had touched the hideous skin of a rattlesnake, he left the apartment, ascended to the hall, and passed out into the street.

The control which he had exercised over himself in the presence of the steward, departed as he found himself in the thoroughfare. A rush of conflicting emotions came on his brain. What was he to do in presence of this unexpected and dangerous rencontre ?

Without knowing well what to do, he walked away some distance to try and collect his thoughts. But the more he tried to form out some plan the more incoherent and disordered his mind seemed to grow. Almost without intending it, he turned into a public-house and, providing himself with the needful stimulant, retraced his steps to the hotel.

The passage and lower rooms were still crowded with people, talking and drinking. He passed through them without noticing any, and, as far as he could see, without being noticed by anyone, to which result he contributed not a little by pulling his hat over his eyes and so concealing his features. Once in the darkness and solitude of the stairs, he quickly gained the door of the apartment in which the prisoner was secreted. The signal agreed on promptly secured his admittance.

"You have been a long time away, Charley," said Kevin. "Was there anything amiss ?"

"No, nothing," said Charley, determining not to torment his friend with the vague anxieties that perplexed himself. "The bar was crowded, and I was delayed. Did anyone knock since ?"

"No, no one."

"Well, so much the better, Kevin, though that landlord should have turned up before now. I wonder what's keeping him?"

"What's that you have got?"

"Whiskey, my dear fellow. What you need badly. Here, take some of it. Not often one passes through such a day as you have done."

"That puts new life in me," said Kevin, as he drank off the grateful stimulant. "I never needed anything so much. And now that we have a little time, tell me how you planned the rescue?"

"It was all Harry Canavan's planning," said Charley, as taking the tumbler from his friend's hand he filled a measure for himself, and forthwith proceeded to narrate the circumstances that occurred after his arrest.

"And so that's how it came about," said Kevin, when he had completed.

"That," said Charley, finishing the contents of his tumbler, "is how it came about. And well planned it was—wasn't it?"

"It was," said Kevin, absently. "That steward, Charley—M'Nab."

"Ay?" queried Charley.

"He must be a tremendous scoundrel."

"Scoundrel isn't half the name for him," said Charley. "There never stood on the soil of Westmeath before a viler thief. Never."

"He seems to be able to do whatever mischief he likes."

"Whatever mischief he likes!" reiterated the other. "I tell you the man who stands gun in hand, and blows his

neighbour's brains out, or who stands, knife in hand, and drives it through his heart, is not half so foul a murderer as he."

"The law has no power over him."

"Law!" said Charley, in tones of anger and disgust; "law indeed! The law will *protect* him—as far as it can, that is—but I have grave doubts, Kevin, that people are bound to let a man like that go scot free, working such evil through the country. A murderer could do no worse—are they bound to let a murderer go loose? A mad dog would not be as dangerous—are people bound to let mad dogs go loose? Take my word for it, Kevin, that let whoever likes say to the contrary——But! hush! Was that a rustle," asked the speaker, suddenly sinking his voice to a whisper, "I heard at the door?"

The serious manner of the whisper and the gravity of the occasion produced a pause.

"I heard nothing," said Kevin, in answering whisper.

"I certainly thought I heard a movement at the door, as if some one were listening there."

"I hope not. That would be awful."

"See! Kevin; step noiselessly," said Charley in bated whisper, "into the wardrobe here. I shall open the door suddenly; and if there be anyone there, by the Lord that made me!——"

Kevin stepped noiselessly, as he was directed, into the wardrobe, closed the door; and the moment after Charley turned the key with rapid twist, with one hand, and with the other pulled the door sharply open and stepped out.

There was no one there. To his inexpressible relief there was no one there. His over-anxiety or the vague uneasiness

hanging over him made his ears susceptible to distant sounds. He was morbidly, unreasonably fearsome.

So he thought, and, so thinking, closed the door after him again, and silently relocked it.

"There was no one there, Charley. You may come out. If there had been—but no matter," said Charley, as he thrust a something, that gleamed quite brightly in the darkness, into his breast; "it's just as well as it is."

"You sent a thrill through me," said Kevin.

"Small wonder. I wish we were out of this. Where is this confounded man? Oh, by the way, he comes at last. I hear his step on the stairs. This is he. I know his step," and, acting on his words, Charley turned the key in the lock, opened the door, and admitted the welcome form of the landlord.

"What in the name of all that's tormenting! kept you?" said Charley. "What an evening you have given us! Here we have been sitting in the dark, surrounded with dangers, and thinking every minute an hour. What delayed you?"

"I couldn't come earlier."

"Why? Was there——"

"The truth is, Charley, I thought it would be dangerous."

"Dangerous!" said Charley, with a sudden and grave sinking of the voice. "Why dangerous? How dangerous?"

"I fancy I am suspected and watched!"

"Watched!"

"I may be wrong, but I think so. There are parties hanging around the bar——"

"I know," said Charley with anxious corroboration.

"And I don't think they mean anything good."

"Do you think they suspect——"

"I am not sure, but I think they do. At any rate, I thought it rather dangerous to leave my place below sooner."

"Do you know," said Charley with sudden impulse, "I think it would be safer if I went homewards. Somebody may have seen me coming up some time since, and——"

"Were you down stairs since you came here?"

"I was."

"That was a dreadfully foolish thing," said the landlord with great gravity.

"It couldn't be helped."

"No matter, it was dangerous all the same. Did anyone see you?"

"I couldn't say."

"Be sure there did. The watchful eyes and ears around there—waiting for a look or a word—were sure to see you."

"What is to be done?"

"What you said just now. Go home at once. Your going will draw away suspicion. And as soon as you have left, I will take our friend here where it will be difficult to find him."

This course was adopted, in hurried conclave, as the wisest.

And, accordingly, with a light step, and as unconscious and careless appearance as he could assume, Charley descended the stairs, mingled unobserved with the people in the bar, had a drink, and with as little delay as he could conveniently make, took his way homeward, a cloud of discomfort and uneasiness hanging around him which he failed to banish.

Meantime the landlord and Kevin chatted on various topics, until such time as Charley might have, by his appearance below, dispelled all suspicion. It was by no means a pleasant conversation, nor one in which either was much at

his ease ; and Kevin, for one, was extremely glad when the landlord said—

“I think we may leave now. There is a comfortable room prepared for you where you may have your dinner, and where all the soldiers in Athlone will fail to find you. Follow me.”

Kevin left the room with him. The former ascended the stairs, the latter followed him. The former stood at what appeared to be an angle of the wall, and fumbled for some time.

Why, Kevin was puzzled to know.

“This is the door,” the hotel-keeper whispered in explanation ; “but hang it ! I cannot get the lock to turn. It has been so long unused that it is stiff. But I shall make it——”

A sudden cry at his elbow made Kevin start, and the next moment he felt himself seized from behind.

“Help ;—help !—the prisoner !—the escaped prisoner ! He’s here !” rang as loud as the utterer could cry it adown the stairs.

Kevin knew at once the voice. The supreme moment had come ! The touch of the serpent was on him !

Wheeling suddenly around, he broke the grasp of the steward ! and dealing him a blow on the face, rendered powerful in its strength by the consciousness of danger and the immensity of the peril that encompassed him, hurled him backward down the stairs.

“Follow me !—follow me, Kevin !—upstairs, further up ! out on the roof !” cried the landlord ; and, much bewildered by the intricacies of the way and the darkness, Kevin, in hurried haste, endeavoured to follow him.

He had only got a few stumbling steps in his upward

retreat, when he found himself once more grasped by the legs and thrown.

"Help! help!—the escaped prisoner. Help!—help! Soldiers!—here, here!"

Kevin was powerless to shake off this time the tiger grasp that clutched him.

Even if he could, it were useless.

The tread of many men ascending the stairs in confused haste, and the clank and clashing of arms, told him that hope of escape was over.

"Who is this?" asked the sergeant ascending.

"This is he," said the steward, "the rescued prisoner."

"So it is," said that officer as he turned the rays of his bull's eye on him. "So it is. What a lucky capture. Handcuff him, men. What a place he chose to hide! Be quick, men!"

The handcuffing was soon over; and whilst Charley was yet less than half way on his homeward route, Kevin was descending the stairs, for the third time a prisoner, and this time with no chance for life or freedom in this world before him.

Hope for him was gone, as certainly as if he were drowning in mid-ocean with hundreds of leagues between him and living being—as surely as if he were in a den with ravenous lions around him.

A cab was passing the hotel. Hailing it—the sergeant and his prisoner and two men with loaded muskets, at half-cock, entered therein; the vehicle drove rapidly along; the rest of the soldiers, with shouldered muskets, ran beside or behind it. And in this strange manner the prisoner once more passed under the archway into the barrack yard, and

thence to the guard room, there to await further orders for reconsignment to his former cell.



CHAPTER XXXII.

THE LAST PARTING.

UNKNOWING of what was passing behind him in the town, Charley pursued his way homewards.

His heart was troubled vaguely, and he knew not why. Occasionally to drive away these ugly brooding thoughts, he cheered himself up with the reflection of the brave evening's work that had been done ; and pictured to himself the bright vision of Kevin Moore, free from danger, and contrasted it with the same person pining in the prison cell with the sentence of death ringing in his ears. This stirred him up somewhat, and his heart grew higher as he thought what a new spirit the news would drive into men's hearts through the length and breadth of Westmeath. The effect, however, was but transient, and again, without knowing why, an uncomfortable gloom settled upon him.

"I don't know what's amiss with me to-night," said Charley at last ; "I'm blest but I am as downhearted as if I were going to be hung myself. I can't stand this any longer, There's no use in going home until I feel better—I couldn't rest there. Stay ! I know what I'll do," he reflected, "I'll go and see how Maury and Norah and Harry Canavan are. I wonder where the girls were when they heard the news, and how they took it. Poor Harry ! how delighted he will be !—Poor fellow !"

This resolution put him into better spirits with himself; his heart beat freer, and with lighter steps he turned from the road into the well-known short-cut through the fields.

He left the highway just in time to avoid meeting a carriage and four which was coming slowly towards him, the lamps shining through the heavy gloom of the autumn night light like distant stars.

"That's Sir Hardinge's carriage," he said, as he paused inside the hedge and awaited its approach; "I wonder what brings him this way. There's no way for him to stop in Grangemore now. That's past and gone, whatever or whoever set it on fire. Maybe he came out to look at the ruins. I wonder if he thinks of those he often left without a roof-tree or shelter himself—or without a bit to eat either. I suppose not. Well, the scales will be weighed for him some time or another—in this world or the next."

With which unconsolatory reflection, Charley, the carriage lamps having disappeared in a turning of the road, pursued his way across the fields, until he came in sight of Orchard Cottage.

"The lights are burning in the window," he said, as he prepared to vault across a gate leading into the breen, "they're not gone to rest yet. They'll be glad to see me, I know. But—Hallo! what in thunder is this? what on earth can be up now?" as the trotting of horses and the jingle of military accoutrements fell on his ear. "I declare to heaven! if it is not the soldiers again! What brought them here now? Searching for Kevin, no doubt. Well, I wish them joy of their chance. It's a mortal pity they haven't—well, no matter, maybe the time is coming!"

With which disconnected thoughts floating in fragmentary

fashion in his brain, the young fellow stood behind the hedge until they had cantered past; then, lightly vaulted over the five-barred gate and proceeded towards the house, entered the bawn, and approached the open door.

"Good night, Maury," he whispered in the ear of the young girl, as she happened to pass from the kitchen to the parlour, at that moment, with a lighted candle in her hand.

"Is that you, Charley?" said Maury, with a slight scream, as she raised the candle above her eyes the better to see him; "you nearly frightened me. When did you come?"

"This minute. Tell me, Maury—what brought the soldiers here? Were they looking for——"

"Ay, Charley, that's what brought them," said Maury, extending her white hand with hearty warmth.

"Well, they didn't find him, Maury?" said Charley, gaily.

"No, they didn't," said Maury, cheerfully. "Thank God for your stout heart, Charley. Faix, it's proud your mother ought to be of you. If Westmeath had many like you—or Ireland either—it's altered times we'd have."

"I'd be very glad to hear you say that—if Kevin wasn't to the fore," said Charley, with a droll gravity which caused an answering smile to flit across the girl's face. "But in truth and fact I had but little to do with it. How is Norah?"

"Grand and delighted."

"Poor girl! how glad I am for her good news! And how is Harry Canavan?"

The girl's face fell.

"Wait a moment, Charley. I'll tell you if he can see you—if he's awake. Poor fellow! he has slept but little these past few nights."

She returned almost immediately.

"Come along, Charley," she said. "He's anxious to see you. He has not been at all well this evening. Don't let him weary himself speaking too much."

He was not at all well, indeed, as the first glance of the visitor's eyes assured him. There was a pallor in his face, which was something more than the latter felt—the while a fluttering grew at his heart—than the paleness of mere illness or delicacy. There was an unusual light in his half-opened eyes that struck him even more remarkably, and impressed him unaccountably with a flutter of awe. It seemed as if it were the first rays of a distant and mysterious light falling on them for the first time. A glassy fixed reflection which overbore, or altered strangely, the usual brightness and intelligence of these orbs.

Norah was sitting by the bed-side, holding his hand. The patient seemed to be slumbering, with unclosed eyes.

"How is he, Norah?" Charley whispered, laying his hands on each of her shoulders, and breathing the question into her ear. A slight inclination of the girl's head admonished him to be silent, but the whisper seemed to fall on the slumberer's ears and woke him.

"Charley!" he said with a faint smile which had some of its old brightness.

"It is I, Harry, my poor fellow. How do you feel to-night?"

"I don't know, Charley—I think better. Some change has come over me, and I think it is for the better. I think I feel stronger." He made a motion as if he would shake hands, but the visitor anticipated his intention, and pressed the united hands of Norah and his.

As he did so, a tear from the girl's eyes fell on his hand. It explained to him more eloquently than words could do how matters were. Unable to control her feelings, or perhaps afraid of the invalid's noticing her tears, Norah quietly withdrew from the apartment.

"Well, Charley," said the former, after a pause in which he seemed from his closed eyes and languid appearance to be asleep, "that Spartan stratagem was put in practice successfully."

"It was, Harry," said Charley, arousing himself from his own reflections.

"And Kevin is free?"

"Free—never to be retaken."

"Thank God!"

There was a pause for some seconds, during which Charley hesitated to renew the conversation.

"Charley!"

"Yes, Harry."

"Do you know I feel very weak—strangely weak."

"You will be better after a short time, Harry."

"I fear not. I have often read of the change that comes before death. It must be that, that has come over me this evening. Even since you came in I feel altered."

"It is only a fancy."

"No. It is reality. I know it. One always does, we are told. I do."

"Don't entertain that notion. Don't give way. It is only a passing weakness."

"It is more than that. But it is not of that I want to speak."

"Yes?"

"No ; not of that Charley, but of the people. What will become of them, finally?"

"Heaven only knows," said Charley, despondingly.

"They have no one to look to but themselves. No one, Charley. Tell them, therefore, to be true to one another, and to stand by the Society. It is their only safety."

"You will be able to tell them yourself," said his friend, assuming a cheerfulness he was far from feeling.

"No, Charley, I feel I shall never leave this bed. Perhaps it is as well, though I am sorry I could not live long enough to see our organization perfected. But tell our friends to stand by one another and by their homes and families. They have no one but themselves to look to."

"Not one," said Charley assentingly.

"Well there is no law, ancient or modern, that teaches people they must consent to see their families done to death before their eyes—for it means that, Charley—without raising a hand to protect them."

"I should think not," said Charley.

"No. History, sacred and profane, teaches otherwise. Preservation and protection of one's self and one's own is the first great law of nature. Whoso acts or teaches otherwise is guilty of crime against nature's laws."

There was a pause here, occasioned by a heavy fit of coughing on the part of the speaker. When it had ceased Charley was surprised to see how suddenly the eyes of the sick man had sunk into his head—and how far.

"Charley, I feel I am too weak for much talking."

"Don't speak any more, Harry," said his friend, with affectionate sympathy in his words and deep sorrow in his heart.

But the prophet's thoughts had wandered and he heard him not.

There was a longer pause this time, which was broken by the invalid.

"There was a time, Charley, when I had hoped to kindle such a life among the people—to bind them together so firmly—that one could no more be rooted out of his land than you could pull a stone out of the tower of Mullannamore; to bind them together against their oppressors with ties, secret or otherwise, stronger than adamant. But it was not decreed."

"You will live to accomplish it yet, Harry."

"No, Charley, the night is darkening, the curtain is falling. I feel that I am drawing to the threshold of the other world. But tell them, Charley, what I have said. Tell them to hold their land, and hold their homes. They may be denounced for it now by many who ought not, but I tell you, Charley, that in years to come, those who are prepared to do so, will not be, as now, banned and anathemaed, but will be looked up to as brave men and true heroes."

There was a longer pause than usual. The sick youth lay back with closed eyes; and so changed had his face become that for a moment the blood rushed back to his companion's heart, for he thought he was dead. But the slight heave of his breast showed otherwise and stayed his surprise.

There was a long and continued silence, during which, save the beating of Charley's heart, no sound arose in the little apartment.

"Was I sleeping, Charley?"

"I think you were."

"I must have been. Charley, will you ask Norah to come to me? You will excuse me"—and one of his old droll smiles brightened over his face—"for turning you out."

"All right, Harry. I want to speak to Maury, so I shall be near at hand when you wish to see me," and delighted to see a gleam—even a faint one—of the once attractive brightness come over his friend, Charley departed on his errand.

"Norah," said the patient, as she promptly entered and resumed her seat by his side, "I feel the great change is coming to me. I have grown much weaker since you left."

"Can I do anything for you, Harry?" Norah asked with difficulty repressing her tears.

"I am as easy as I can be. If you would only, Norah, sit where I can see you I should be glad. My eyes are growing dim, Norah, and I cannot see you unless the light shines full on your face."

"Dear Harry!"

"Ah, Norah," said the invalid, with a strange tenderness in his low words, "it was always new life to me to see your face. It ever caused happiness that I could not account for to my heart. Oh! the cloud of sorrow and loneliness and disappointment that fell on me when you went away!"

"Poor Harry!" said Norah, as, wholly unable to control her sorrow, she bent over his hand and kissed it whilst her hot tears fell thereon.

"So it was, Norah, with me. Whenever I had great dreams—and I had high dreams and bright anticipations once—they were always associated with you. If I read in ancient Irish story of some beautiful princess, I associated her with you. If down the glittering page of antique legend.

and romance fair forms of saint or lover became enpictured, I always thought of you—always."

But Norah could make no remark, but bathed his hand with her flood of tears, whilst a fit of coughing stopped his utterance.

"These dreams are all past, Norah, and perhaps I should not mention them, nor would I but that I have a favour to ask!"

Norah, the tears rolling down her face, lifted her blue eyes in gentle query to his.

A faint smile again brightened over his face—so passing, indeed, that it was scarcely perceptible—as her eyes rested on him.

"It is this, Norah : that you will hold my hand when the final moment comes—that my hand may feel the clasp of yours."

"Oh, Harry!" broke from Norah in great anguish and sorrow,

—— "And that you will, Norah, come sometimes to my grave and pray over it. There is a happy future before you, Norah, and it will not render it, I hope, the less so to know that there is sleeping there for ever one who—who—loved you, dearly. Promise me, Norah."

"Oh, Harry, I do promise—but I hope it will be long until ——"

"No, Norah, not long. I feel the next world fast approaching. If Father John ——"

The door softly opened, and the priest entered. The eyes of the old woman, more accustomed than the girls to the shadow that death sends before, had seen earlier the approach of the dread comer, and had sent for him.

At a gentle touch of his hand on her shoulder Norah rose and withdrew, and the priest took her place.

In half an hour or so, the voice of the priest, calling to them from the door, summoned the little household to the bedside.

The patient was falling into a doze or sleep.

The lighted candle was in his hand, and the emblem of salvation to his lips. A marked alteration had, even during that short time, taken place in him. That the great Change was coming to him was now palpable to all.

They knelt to say the Litany for the Dying, whilst Norah took his hand gently in hers, and with the other kept the crucifix before his face.

He was saying something which she could not hear. She bent over him to listen.

“What is it, Harry?”

“I know now, Norah, who struck me. It was the Scotch steward. He was here just now. God forgive——”

His whisper failed, and his eyes falling on the cross, closed; he seemed in prayer.

Opening them again, his gaze went vacantly round the room; but alighting on her face a faint light seemed to grow in them—to gather into them—remain there for the briefest interval of time, and then suddenly fly therefrom!

Suddenly fly thereout! Like a brief glimmer of sunlight falling on glass and instantaneously vanishing; and with it a strange feeling of absence and oblivion. So silent, so mysterious, and so irrevocable.

“He is gone. May the Lord receive his soul!” said Father John solemnly.

A cry, of blended surprise and sorrow, burst from the

two girls. It was only then they realised what that suddenly vanishing light meant, and that the great and mysterious moment had indeed come and passed!

Poor Prophet! Until the great day comes when all the sons of men shall be gathered together to receive judgment for their good and evil works, there shall be no more account of thee! Roofless homes and ruined hearts in Westmeath shall no more trouble thee. Bright dreams of freedom and liberty—of an enfreedomed people and a happy land—shall never kindle rapture in thy heart!

The heavens be thy bed, and the light of glory to thine eyes!

They knelt around the bed, with eyes suffused with tears, to say the prayers for the departed—when they were startled from them by the tread of horses cantering into the yard and a hurried knocking at the door.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

NEMESIS.

"THIS way, Jervis," said Colonel Montfort, as, hurrying from his quarters, he led the way for his guest to the guard room where the recaptured prisoner was—much to the sailor's discomfort.

"May a cyclone whirl me to Ould Davy!" said the latter energetically as he barked his shins against an iron hand rail, "if this is not running under a heavy sou'-easter with a nor'-east wind on the larboard. Where are you bringing me to?"

"Come along, captain ; you'll soon know all about it. I am sorry to discommode you, but you will see the reason presently."

"I hope so," said the captain, rather doubtingly ; "this seems running under heavy sail for no purpose."

Out of the darkness of the barrack-square they presently emerged into the brightness of the guard-room.

"And so you are here again, prisoner," said the colonel addressing Kevin, who sat, surrounded with armed men, gazing into the fire.

"I am here again," said the latter, standing up as he heard the words addressed to him.

"Well, I am glad to see it and sorry to see it," said the colonel ; "glad to know that the law cannot be outraged with impunity ; sorry to see one so young and—and—interesting—in your position."

The colonel was about to say innocent, but he checked himself.

"I did not seek the position," said Kevin quietly, but firmly ; "it has been forced on me. I cannot help it. I am not the first who suffered innocently, nor shall I, I suppose, be the last."

The consciousness that the last chance for life had been hazarded and failed, made him, if not reckless, strong and purposefull. Of purpose full to die, resolutely and firmly.

"I repeat again, I am sorry for it. But if——"

"Why ! may a simoon strike me !" said Captain Jervis, in energetic fashion urging his way to the front, and very nearly elbowing the colonel aside, "this is not my fellow-passenger on the raft—is it ?"

"Captain Jervis !" cried Kevin in wild surprise, as the

former extended his tanned and browned hand ; and, making an attempt to respond thereto, found himself checked by the handcuffs.

"Ay, the same, my lad, and glad to see you. At least I would," said the honest captain, as with some embarrassment he withdrew his hand, when he saw the bound condition of the other, "if the cable was not wound round you in this way."

"It cannot be helped, captain ; but I am glad to see you at any rate."

"Not half as glad as I am to see you. But what is the meaning of all this? You have not been ringleading a mutiny—have you?"

"No, I haven't," said Kevin, the hearty brusqueness of the sailor evoking a smile even out of his hopeless condition.

"Nor refusing to go aloft?"

"No."

"And what are you here for?"

"Whatever it's for, captain, I'm here, and it can't be helped or undone."

"Can't be helped!" said the captain in honest indignation. "It can be helped, and it must be helped! An able-bodied seaman and a willing hand—ready and able to do his duty—is not to be put in irons for nothing. If the vessel were even to run on a reef I wouldn't allow it. Sink me, cargo and all—if I would!"

"When did you happen to come here?" asked Kevin quietly, as he saw that the honest captain was about to burst forth into another piece of angry but useless declamation.

"Not an hour ago. Come quite by accident. But if I had known how you were I would have come a thousand miles."

Kevin hung his head slightly at the undoubted burst of sympathy.

"Ay, a thousand miles, my lad. You saved my life when the sea ran mountains high in Biscay. Ay, when a porpoise could hardly float and live. And I'll see if I can't repay the good turn."

"No more of this, Jervis," said the colonel, whispering in his ear, "or not here at least. Another time you may speak. There is a different duty to be done at present."

"What is it?" enquired the captain shortly.

"To sign this; his recommittal to the gaol," said the colonel, smoothing over on the table before him a large square of foolscap which one of the gaol officials had presented to him. "That is my business, and not an agreeable one."

"I am sorry to see it."

"I am sure you are. I am not overjoyed at it myself, but duty must be done——What!—what is this uproar for? Who makes this noise?" asked the colonel angrily, as he raised his form erect in the act of signing the document, whilst a hurried inrush of trampling feet broke the silence and quietude of the guard-room. "Who presumes to intrude thus?"

"Is Colonel Montfort here?" asked a stranger, entering hurriedly.

"Yes, I am Colonel Montfort," said the officer angrily and haughtily. "What is the reason of this untoward intrusion, and at this time of night?"

"I am Doctor Melville, colonel, the newly-appointed regimental surgeon to this station."

"And I should think, sir, that, even so, you might an-

nounce your coming in more seemly fashion, and at a more seasonable hour."

"The manner nor the time is not of my seeking, as I think you will admit when you hear my story."

"Your story!" said the colonel, staring somewhat vacantly. "Your story! What story have you to tell?"

"Your question is natural enough," said the doctor, "but I have been some hours in Ireland—in Athlone——"

His statement vanished with surprise as his eyes fell on the convict.

"Well, sir," said the colonel somewhat testily as the other broke off his statement thus abruptly, "what of that? A residence of five hours in Ireland, or even in Athlone, does not warrant one in breaking the rules of discipline or common sense after this fashion. We may be barbarians, but there are some rules of civilisation to guide us."

"Excuse me, colonel," said the young gentleman, "I need the aid of a magistrate to take information, and you are the only one at hand. Time is pressing—is very pressing. Were it otherwise I should not have obtruded myself in this unseemly fashion."

"What need?—what pressing need?" asked the colonel.

But the doctor drew him aside, and without delay poured a hurried discourse into his ear.

At the first words the colonel's testiness and impatience ceased; the next moment he grew deeply interested; and before the doctor had completed his statement the expression on his face grew into one of great and startled surprise.

"Where?" said he finally, as the other's whisperings ceased.

"About five miles from here."

"Then there's not a moment to be lost?"

"Not a second."

The colonel stooped down once more to the committal paper before him on the table, signed it and said: "Take him away. See that he is carefully secured!" Then to the sailor, "I must trespass on your good nature something more, my dear captain. This night seems one of surprises. Get on your overcoat. We have a drive of some miles before us. It is for your friend the convict," whispered he in explanation, "his life and freedom depends on our haste."

That was quite enough for the sailor. He did not clearly understand the matter; but the intimation conveyed in the last few words was clear enough, and with cheerful alacrity, he at once proclaimed himself ready.

Meanwhile the doctor had good-naturedly got mixed up with the guard who were shuffling off the prisoner on his way to his cell again, and with a whispered earnestness that sent a new strength to the convict's heart, said:

"Don't be downhearted. This night is a stranger one than that in the *Rue de Seine*. Sleep soundly."

The next moment the clank of the guard was heard passing away through the flagged corridors, whilst the colonel, bending again over the table, wrote in the guard-book whither he was going and where he should be found if any of his officers wanted him. Then doctor, colonel, and sea-captain, thus strangely brought together, passed out into the night, and mounting the car that awaited them were being whirled as fast as whip and mettled horse could drive them to that little ruined cabin, under the oak trees by the frowning Shannon, of which we wot so much of late.

They had not been long gone, the ink on the guard-book was hardly dry, the sergeant for the night had scarcely seated himself in his chair before the fire and taken up the paper to read, when the rapid tramp of horses' hooves was heard in the paved yard outside, and the rider jumping off, hurried into the guard-room, his heavy riding-boots and spurs making multitudinous echoes on the stone floor.

"No one here? Where is Colonel Montfort?"

"Gone out, lieutenant," said the sergeant quickly, alert, and standing with his hand at salute.

"Gone out! Where?"

"This is his writing," said the sergeant, pointing to the guard-book. "He wrote it himself, not ten minutes ago."

"To——. Where the devil is the place?" asked the officer in impatient hot haste.

"I don't know more than you see."

"Who knows?"

"I can't tell. I don't know."

"Who went with him?"

"The new regimental doctor."

"What!"

"The new doctor."

"The doctor! When did he come?"

"Not ten minutes ago!"

◆ "Good God! The two men of all others in this world I want. How shall I—where shall I—find them?"

"If you gallop hard you may overtake them."

"Ay, but how?—in what direction? Who can guide me?"

"The corporal outside, perhaps."

"Does he know?"

"He may."

"All right, send him in at once. God bless me ! What a time it is, and how strangely things run ! What a wonderful land ! or is it we that make it wonderful ? "

Whilst the officer is hurriedly questioning the corporal, perhaps we may tell what caused his impetuous entrance.

After Rupert Clarendon had left Orchard Cottage, and got into the high road, he went very rapidly. He had fulfilled his uncomfortable mission to his satisfaction ; had won over the girls to his view of the case, and to his view of the surrounding circumstances ; had indeed impressed them with a sense of his entire sympathy with them and with the escaped prisoner ; and much gratified with the fortunate *denouement* of his hateful ride, and in high spirits, galloped rapidly forward, accompanied by his troop.

The darkness of the summer night had long fallen, and they rode onward in the gloom. The clank and clatter of the horsemen prevented all other sounds from being heard.

With much accompaniment of noise from jingling scabbard and horses' hooves, they passed by the little brook where Rupert had witnessed on his arrival the interview between Maury O'Keeffe and Joe ; rode past the corner which had shut out the form of the young girl on that day ; and cantered up the hill.

A carriage was before them on the slope as they crossed the arch of the bridge. So much they could see by the lamps, which, hidden themselves, threw their gleam forward in curious contrast with the surrounding gloom.

There was apparent, as soon as the carriage itself became apparent, some confusion among the horses. Evidently the clatter of the horsemen suddenly coming on them had startled them. And following on this in rapid succession, it became

manifest also that the horses had broken loose from the control of their driver, and were plunging madly forward down the hill.

For a moment Rupert looked on in amazement! The remembrance of his own terrible race thereadown came upon him!

It was clear that by some extraordinary coincidence another incident of the same desperate character was taking place. The dreadful quarry lay to them as it did to him—straight before!

Even now, whilst these thoughts flew with more than electric speed through his mind, the hoof beats of the horses that bore the carriage, speeding madly along, fell on his ears—and its whirling lights on his eyes!

The doomed occupants, whoever they were, were being swept forward to destruction!

It was not from any process of reasoning that Rupert was urged forward; it was sheer instinct born of emergency.

Driving the spurs into his horse's sides, he flew after the carriage.

If he could but overtake it—if he could but come in advance of the leader—he might be able to pull him up, throw him on his haunches, or, at worst, turn him from the straight path that led to the dreadful precipice.

Wherefore—quick as his horse could bear him—he flew forwards!

The carriage lights shone before him in whirling gleams as the horses, mad and blind with affright and uncontrol, swept forward!

Urging his horse to his highest speed, he felt that he was gaining on them!

His heart rose high, and he drove the spurs into his horse afresh as he bent forward in his eagerness. Even in his breathless chase he could not help marvelling how well the tearing steeds before him kept the middle of the road in the darkness. Pray heaven they might continue to keep it!

His own horse seemed to catch some of the excitement of the chase. He flew forward, with lightning speed, gaining neck by neck, until his panting nostrils were behind the back of the carriage!

A minute more Rupert was beside the occupants. He had barely time to glance at them when a breaking, crushing noise occurred in front, and on the moment a cry of deadly horror and affright burst from the open carriage, as the white face and slender form of a young girl, with a glance behind, stood upright therein—with hands in uttermost terror thrown upwards!

With the self-same promptings of instinct, Rupert bent down in his saddle; threw his arm around the slender form, and, with sudden and vigorous effort, swept her on to his saddle-bows. The next moment horses and carriage, with a clattering of breaking glass and timbers, and an extinguishment of lights, had burst through the frail barrier and disappeared into the yawning abyss of the quarry!

With difficulty and imminent peril, Rupert, holding the fainting form of the young girl with one hand, with the other reined up his steed. A second more, had he not restrained his steed, would have seen him also precipitated into the quarry.

He stood panting and breathless, utterly bewildered by the suddenness of the accident—for the whole matter had

only taken a few seconds—and scarcely realizing what he had done.

The perspiration poured from his forehead, blinding his eyes, already dimmed by the sudden disappearance of the flashing lights.

"This is awful," said the sergeant, as the troop, galloping forward at their best, came to him. "They must be all killed in the quarry. Nothing living could survive that plunge."

"Who is it?" asked Rupert, breathlessly.

"Sir Hardinge Hargrave and his son."

"Sir Hardinge! My God! No."

"It is, indeed—or was—for they must be smashed to——"

"And this young lady——"

"Is Miss Hargrave. You saved her life bravely, sir, and there is no officer in the force, and no man in Ireland, could have done it but yourself."

"What will be done?" asked Rupert in horror, as he looked at the broken gates through which the carriage had been precipitated, and then at the young lady in his arms.

"Let the men dismount and give all the assistance they can. And I am greatly afraid that won't be much."

"I fear not! Heaven help them!" said Rupert, as he thought with a shudder of his own plunge. "Give the necessary orders. Do whatever you can—and at once. What can be done for this poor girl? She is quite unconscious"

"Small wonder," said the soldier. "Bring her to the nearest house. She will be better there than here for the present."

"Where is that?"

"As far as I know the country about here, the nearest

place is the house we have just left. That poor girl is in a bad way. But a second later and her eyes would never have opened in this world again."

"I believe you are right," said Rupert. "Let one of the men accompany me, the others remain to assist you."

There was no time for delay. The soldiers were quickly dismounted, their horses picketed by the roadside; whilst the soldiers improvising such lights as they could, made their way down the side of the quarry to where the horses and occupants and carriage lay in crushed wreck and ruin.

Rupert, with the senseless form of Miss Lucy Hargrave in his arms, and attended by a solitary horseman, rode back to Orchard Cottage; and it was his approach that had broken in on the prayers of the sorrowful group that had gathered around the bed—whence the soul of the high spirited and gentle youth had sped into the summer night!

With a few hurried words in explanation of what had happened, Rupert committed the unconscious young lady to the ministering hands of the two girls, who, he was perfectly assured, would take gentle care of her; and rode back at all speed to the place of the accident.

Numbers of country people had assembled by this time; lights had been procured; but the first sight that presented itself to Rupert's gaze was the forms of the baronet and his son being borne on shutters on men's shoulders up from the ruin below. It was a shocking sight;—but for the moment there flashed across Rupert's mind the story that the coachman had told him of the morning when he had seen the dead body of his uncle, Colonel Clarendon, borne therefrom also after his fatal duel!

The bodies—it was difficult to say whether life was quite

extinct, so torn and mangled were they—were borne to the nearest place of shelter. And the nearest place of shelter, in their present condition, and until a doctor could see and minister to them, was in the ruined walls some few fields away, which once the family of Kevin Moore called—Home!

The necessity for medical aid was urgent, if life might still be lingering in the crushed and mangled forms; and Rupert as soon as he saw them laid therein was once more in the saddle riding to Athlone. He had stopped on his way through the street to call at the local doctor's, but not finding him in, had continued his ride to report to the colonel, who he knew would be greatly surprised and afflicted by the tragic occurrence.

As we have seen, he failed to find the latter officer in, and as soon, therefore, as he could procure an attendant who knew the locality whither he had gone, was swiftly on the way after him; to make his report and, laying hands on the doctor, bear him to the place where his skill and aid were so badly wanting.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

MIDNIGHT ON THE SHANNON.

KELIFF M'NAB, late steward of Grangemore, when he had seen his enemy once more in the hands of the law and justice, felt satisfied. Then he bethought him—whither he should go. There was but slight welcome for him, he well knew, at any place in the town; there was still less in the

country districts. There was possibility of danger for him everywhere. For the present, there was no home for him amid the burned walls of Grangemore.

It was only for one night, however. He was pretty well assured that Lady Hargrave would provide for him on the morrow.

A thought occurred to him! It had been rankling in his mind all day, cropping up even under the exciting incidents that had taken place. It grew stronger now that all doubts as to the trial and its results were over, and that his mind so far was appeased. It grew stronger and stronger, until—with that fascination that sometimes draws people in the direction in which their terror and danger have their source—as a belated wayfarer, timid and fearful, will fain cast his eyes, in despite of himself, in the direction whence he dreads the appearance of a ghost—his uncertain and wandering steps bent them in the direction of the ruined cabin by the Shannon side, where he had been the night before.

There was an uncomfortable feeling around him which he could not get the better of—horrible thoughts springing up which he could not control—and to allay them, and to ease his mind, he left the town, and taking his way by the river banks, in the dark, made his way to the place.

It was approaching midnight when he reached there. He wandered, for some half mile or so, up and down the river banks, peering into the side pools and back waters thereof, apparently looking for something. Walking through tall flaggers, creeping under the brushwood that grew close to its edge, glancing around any protruding barriers that stayed or barred the current of the stream—but there was nothing there of the character that he seemed to expect. Any black

substance—collection of floating leaves or otherwise—he carefully turned over with his stick ; but still there was nothing there to satisfy his attention.

Whatever he was searching for, was not there—or was not at all events observable.

Much relieved and satisfied, he abandoned his inspection, and directed his footsteps towards the cabin. To his surprise he saw again lights there !

From under the protecting shelter of a clump of furze he watched the house. The broken door was re-hung and closed. Much disturbed, he drew near, and, hearing voices talking, listened.

Demons of earth and air!—what low tones—what woman's voice was that he heard ! Had the night and Shannon given up their dead ! Had the drowning waters yielded up their prey !

He listened on ; whilst the drops of perspiration—begotten of supreme terror and fear—grew thick and rounded on his forehead.

Then suddenly he started up. For a second he glanced up at the thatched roof, and around it, as if he were speculating whether he should not set it on fire and burn to death all within.

But if he entertained the idea, it was impracticable ; and the next moment he was hurrying with blind fear from the place, and in the direction of Grangemore !

The first faint rays of the early summer dawn were beginning to tinge, with a roseate hue, the rim of the horizon in the distant East, when the gentlemen left the cabin.

"This has been a singular business," said the doctor.

"Most extraordinary and most providential," said

the Colonel, gravely. "It is stranger than the wildest fiction."

"I never had a doubt," said the captain, "since the night we sailed through the storm on a broken mast, that they were both innocent."

"But the most remarkable thing of all," said Rupert, "was the turning up, by the oddest of chance, of this second convict. An hour later, or a day earlier, and what evil had been done!"

"That puts me in mind, Rupert—what do you propose doing?"

"Taking the doctor with me to see the injured gentleman," said Rupert. "They should have had assistance long before this if it were possible."

"Right, Rupert. I should go with you myself, but that it is necessary I should go back to Athlone to complete these depositions, and make out the warrant for arrest. There is not a moment to be lost in these things. I shall ride out to see the gentlemen as soon after as may be."

"By the way, Rupert," added Colonel Montfort, as they were parting.

"Yes," said Rupert.

"In case I should fail to see you before morning, take a troop of your men and arrest this villain. You will find your authority on my writing desk."

In a moment more the doctor and Rupert Clarendon were riding towards the scene of the accident.

But their presence was useless. The baronet and his son had breathed their last, hours before. Had, indeed, been dead what time they were carried up from the quarry and borne to the ruined farm-house.

Thence the two rode to Orchard Cottage, where, leaving the doctor to attend to the still unconscious girl, Rupert sped back to the barracks.

Much as he should have liked to remain and talk with and console the two girls, there was a purpose still more fixed and resolved in his heart—the arrest of the villain who had been at foot of all these troubles. Not a moment, so far as he was concerned, should be lost in bringing him to justice. Wherefore, with hurried but cheerful apologies, Rupert was away on his mission back to Athlone.

"Rupert," said the colonel, as they met at the barrack door, "do you remember the night when we missed our way?"

"Yes," said Rupert.

"You remember the party we saw tying up the bundles of sticks in the out-offices of Grangemore?"

"Yes?" assented and queried Rupert.

"That was the time he was preparing to burn the mansion."

"I think you are right," said Rupert. "A wonder we never thought of it before."

"That bears out the dying creature's statement."

"It does. But there is something even stranger than the poor girl's story."

"Something stranger!"

"Aye, colonel; something stranger."

"What is it?"

"This villain and scoundrel we are now in search of is son to—guess whom?"

"How should I know?"

"To——." Rupert whispered the name in his ear.

"Nonsense!—absurd!" cried the colonel in great surprise.

"True as the sun is rising yonder."

"How could that be?"

"Born before her marriage with Sir Hardinge."

"That is true?"

"Unquestionably true."

"Well, it is, if that be so," said the colonel, standing in a state of intense astonishment, "a strange world."

"Strange or otherwise, that is the case," said Rupert, as he cantered forward with his men.

He rode forward some distance in deep reverie. Without well knowing why, or indeed thinking of it, he had taken once more the direction of Orchard Cottage. Remembering himself, he reined up to consult with the sergeant in attendance.

He had scarcely done so than a form emerged from the hedge beside him.

"I know whom you are seeking," said the man, "you will find him in the ruins of Grangemore."

"Whom are we seeking?" asked Rupert, a good deal surprised and displeased at this apparition.

"The Scotch steward—M'Nab."

"How do you know?" asked he again, suspicious that the party had overheard his conversation with his subaltern, and might be misdirecting him.

"I saw him go in that direction last night."

"What is your name?"

"Darby Kelly."

"Come with me," said Rupert, more to prevent his spreading the news around, and so putting the fugitive on his guard than for any other purpose.

The newcomer, however, was nothing loath to do so.

And on the way he told Rupert that he had been with others in the neighbourhood of the cabin by the river last night, had watched the motions of the steward, had seen him go to the cabin door and listen, had seen his hurried and disordered flight thence, had watched whither, and had traced him to Grangemore. Further: told him of his presence on the previous night there also, and of the cry they had heard of woman's voice drowning in the river, and of his appearance shortly after—all in strong corroboration, if corroboration were needed, of the dying girl's story.

"He must be a singularly dreadful villain," said Rupert, when Darby Kelly came to the end of his tale.

But the narrator omitted to inform him that their own business there last night—he, the music-maker, and others—was, when they heard of Kevin Moore's recapture, to concert fresh measures in face of this untoward event for his safety, and in the hope of meeting Charley: and that their own surprise was little less than that of the steward when they saw lights and heard strange voices in the abandoned cabin.

There was a range of outhouses at Grangemore that had been saved from the fire. These the soldiers searched. They all stood empty and open save one—the hay-loft.

This was firmly barred and fastened from within.

"He's hiding there," remarked the sergeant.

"Force the door open."

The former was about to fire his pistol through the lock to break it, but Rupert ordered him to desist.

"You might shoot him," he said, "we must bring him in safe and unhurt if possible."

Getting a charred plank of timber out of the debris of

the ruin, they applied it to the door after the fashion of a battering-ram.

Four or five plunges of it were sufficient to burst the door from its fastenings and stave it inwards ; and with it in rushed a number of the soldiers.

He was not there !

They rushed up the narrow stairway.

“ He is here ! ” cried the foremost soldier, as soon as his head appeared above the loft. “ He is here !—standing in the corner ! ”

Whilst Rupert awaited his arrest, he was surprised to hear from the men upstairs a cry of fear and astonishment, and a confused tumbling down stairs ; whilst some of them, throwing open the upper door, leaped in confusion therefrom to the ground.

“ What is amiss ? What are you afraid of ? ” asked Rupert angrily, as he glanced at the scared faces of the men. “ Is he not there ? ”

“ He is, but—he is dead ! He’s hanged himself ! ”

The steward was standing, apparently, in the corner hiding ;—and when the foremost soldier rushed over and seized him he swung easily around, and the affrighted soldiers saw—the sight that scared them !

CHAPTER XXXV.

CONCLUSION.

THE time allotted by the judge for the dread penalty was not long.

Proofs and all, though they had in their hands of the prisoner's innocence, it was necessary—to save him—to lay these without delay before the supreme pardoning power. It was not easy, even with fair proofs of innocence, to set aside the death sentence. That the colonel well knew.

There was not a moment to be lost. The Lord Lieutenant was in London. The judges who held the commission in his absence would be slowest of all men to set aside a verdict, or respite a prisoner under sentence of death, without, perhaps, more legal proofs than could be readily brought.

Accidents of this kind had happened before, and might happen again now.

In a hurried consultation of the officers, it was decided that Rupert should at once proceed to London bearing the documents and a letter from the colonel with him. His friends were wealthy, aristocratic, and influential; were high up in the governing body, and not only hand-in-hand with the Ministry, but in the Cabinet themselves. It was there relief should be looked for, sought, and found.

There was not a moment to be lost, if the prisoner's life were to be absolutely assured him.

Swift as relays of horses could bear him—it was in the

pre-railway days—Rupert sped forward to the Irish metropolis.

The boat was leaving for Liverpool as he drove down the quays. He stepped on board without a moment's delay, and took the first rest he had had for some nights.

Arrived in Liverpool, he lost no time; but from stage to stage, from town to town, on the great highway to London, by relays of horses, he flew forward. How slow—notwithstanding all his speed—the three hundred miles or so that intervened between Liverpool and the great metropolis, seemed to pass over! How he counted the nights and days and, totting them up, subtracted them from the ever lessening sands of time that measured the prisoner's fleeting life!

Would London never be reached! Mail-drivers marvelled to see the chaise that, in a whirl of dust, spun forward on the summer roads. Stage owners and hostlers, waked up suddenly in the night time to provide fresh horses, wondered what matter of life or death could send the headlong traveller speeding thus untiringly forward.

London reached, he lost no time in making intercession with his powerful friends. Such force and pleading as his was not to be denied. He did not rest satisfied until, under the Sovereign's own hand, he had obtained full and complete pardon.

With no delay he resumed his journey back, the precious missive in his keeping.

How bright looked the world on his return journey, lit up not alone with the summer's sun, but with the, to him, brighter sunlight of Norah's radiant eyes! The very darkest night, as he sped along, grew bright with the beauty and

the loveliness of her bewitching smiles: with the love and gratitude that he saw beaming in anticipation from the kindling depths of her blue eyes!

He arrived in Athlone, way-worn and tired—but still filled with untiring energy—on the day preceding that fixed for the execution. The scaffold was a-building—no, not a-building, it was too often used for that—but a-putting in order, when, covered with the dust of his long journey, he stood once more in his colonel's presence!

It were but telling an old tale to tell of the joy that came on all hearts in Orchard Cottage when Kevin Moore stood at last amongst them a free man.

And when, a few months afterwards, Rupert Clarendon bore with him to India, to his new command there, his beautiful wife, there were wafted after him and the beautiful girl, whose love he had won, more sincere good wishes than ever since followed aught parting from Irish shores.

Lucy Hardinge was long in recovering from the brain fever into which the occurrences of that dreadful night had thrown her. But she was carefully tended by the young English doctor: and what was more fitting than that afterwards—many months afterwards—the heiress of Grangemore should give him her hand and fortune!

"Who'd have thought," Convict No. 37 used to say, "when we were in the hospital at Plymouth, that the doctor so kind and attentive to us would one day own Grangemore an' Carrigbrae?"

Who, indeed? But the ways of the world and the chances of life are strange—very strange!

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Kevin Moore and Maury Keefe lived in Orchard Cottage long enough to see tall men and fair girls grow up around them—to whom the story of the convict times were a dim tradition. Phelim Rorke lived with them, taking care, however, in good time, to take possession of the hidden treasure in the old rath in Clare ; and whatever ill-deeds, if any, its hider had been guilty of in acquiring it in forgotten times, were amply atoned for by the good uses to which Convict No. 37 applied it—in acts of unseen benevolence amongst the poor and afflicted of Westmeath. But, curiously enough, to the end of his life, he bore on his neck and face strange red marks where the grasp of the haunting spirit had been on him that terrible night in Clare.

The association inaugurated in the ruined abbey at Mullawnabeg spread through the length and breath of Westmeath, and did essential service for years in keeping the people in their homes, and not until a “great leader” arose in Ireland, who promised the people Freedom, Repeal and what not, by the agency of immense demonstrations and speeches in the House of Commons, was its influence abated. The “great leader,” however, omitted to inform them that never in the pages of History—Ancient or Modern, Sacred or Profane—was it recorded that the conqueror’s grip (whether that of a nation or individual) on the throat of a subject nation had been relaxed until broken by force—until the foreigner and oppressor had been thrust back with bullet or steel. So the people—with what, looking back on it now, must be deemed a species of national frenzy—took to “monster meetings,” “tremendous cheering,” and “great victories.” The Government and the landlords looked on complacently at their

monster meetings and great victories. They were welcome to as many newspaper victories as they liked—and much good they might do them! But whilst they were away huzzaing and cheering, the Crowbar Brigade was at work behind them levelling their homes. Each saw his neighbour's house and family doomed; but believed his own secure—he would have Repeal and protection next year. It was a sort of political vision of Mirza. The sturdy days of resistance and combination and self-reliance were over, and the era of depopulation had set in with renewed vigour. The climax of ruin, however, was reached in gloomy '48, when, amidst the lowing of fattening herds, and wide fields of waving corn, the Irish people laid themselves meekly down to die. How it came to pass that so gallant a race, whose valour and dauntlessness have been proved on the battle fields of the world, should not have had the genius or the courage to "hold the harvest" for themselves and their families, and so shield them from ruin and death, is one of the many inexplicable things in this Irish land.

The territory of Grangemore alone, of all Westmeath, came unharmed out of the evil time, and is even now a pleasant oasis in that landlord-ridden county. And among the wealthiest farmers therein are the descendants of Convict No. 25.

For the rest the broadest estates and highest rank in Devonshire are to-day held by those who owe, if not their name, at least their bright eyes and handsome looks to the fair visitor at Orchard Cottage.



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